Islam versus modernity

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To the victims of Islam and politico-religious oppression

CONTENTS

Introduction - Decolonizing the Orient

1 - The world of yesterday: memory of an Oriental

2 - The myth of the Islamic golden age

3 - The wretched of the earth

4 - Progressives and noble savages

5 - Archaisms and despotisms

6 - On the assault of the free world

Epilogue - Leaving Islam

Notes

Introduction Decolonizing the Orient

Destinies are formed slowly and no one knows among all our acts sown at random, which will germinate to flourish, like trees. Maurice Druon, The Accursed Kings “God is my witness, during my stay [in France], I was saddened by the fact that they enjoy there all those things which are lacking in the Muslim kingdoms,” lamented the Egyptian writer Rifâ'a al-Tahtâwî, dazzled by the splendor of Molière’s homeland in contrast to the state of the Islamic world.1 What cry would he utter in the face of the tragedy that Muslim societies perpetuate? Born fourteen centuries ago at the pinnacle of the civilized world, Islam2 now harbors a disproportionate number of backward regimes. "The religion of Muhammad [...] seems to condemn to eternal slavery, to incurable stupidity, all this vast portion of the earth where it has extended its empire," judged the philosopher Condorcet, whose words resonate with bitter accuracy. While Muslim societies are mired in the violence and darkness that so many nations have overcome, the world accommodates itself to these scourges that are festering in the East, turning a blind eye to their origins, preferring worn-out scapegoats. “The progress of the West was built on blood, tears, massacres, genocide, and exploitation,” proclaims Turkish President Erdoğan, as if the history of Islam were a tranquil river before its clash with modern Europe.4 The fable that the Old Continent alone plunged Africa and the Orient into this “colonial night” decried by the Algerian Ferhat Abbas only convinces the naive for whom traditional societies were “courteous, fraternal, cooperative, or democratic,” to quote Aimé Césaire’s lie.5 These countries did not wait for Bonaparte’s arrival in Egypt to become the playground of conquerors, slave traders, and tyrants, whose native hand was no gentler than that of the infidels. Neither the Sokoto Caliphate, nor the Ottoman, Mughal, Toucouleur, Wassoulou, Kong, or Ashanti empires, nor the Barbary Regencies, the Mahdist state, the Fouta Djallon Imamate, nor the sultanates of Ouaddaï, Morocco, Zanzibar, or the Comoros, among other regimes defeated by Europeans, can be celebrated as models of humanism. Like the Turks, who seized Constantinople, threatened Vienna twice, and still occupy Cyprus, it is reasonable to doubt that

these powers would have confined themselves to peacefully cultivating their own lands had they initiated the Industrial Revolution. The vengeful indigenous rights activists and the penitent Third Worldists love to castigate the West, guilty, it is true, of the crimes that all hegemony engenders. But they will not have us believe that our world would be more civilized if the steam engine had fallen into the hands of Muslim societies in the first place. These nations, defeated by more powerful ones, were also steeped in the oppressions that weave the fabric of human tragedy. Much to the chagrin of Rousseau's followers, no people is everywhere and always innocent. The fall of traditional chieftaincies does not warrant a tear, even if one would have preferred it to have occurred smoothly, by those most directly affected, just as one might have wished for the European Ancien Régime to fade away without the Napoleonic upheaval, giving way to "markets opening to trade and minds opening to ideas." But while Europe embraced the ideals of the French Revolution and parts of Asia awakened to the benefits of modernity, Muslims—with a few dissenters—remained resistant to the humanism born of the Greco-Roman world they had lived alongside, even to the point of consuming it. The history of the Muslim world is marked by missed opportunities to become familiar with the most refined cultures of its neighbors, as if a curse had condemned it to blindness. Sixty years after a colonial subjugation from which it could have made better use of its resources, Islam is resigned to the setbacks inflicted upon it by its own children: millions of Muslims are fleeing their lands, where their faith reigns supreme, to taste the more succulent fruits of this decadent West. These unwitting renegades are defying the ancient norm that condemns living among unbelievers. “A Muslim has no excuse before God for staying in a city of unbelievers unless he is just passing through,” grumbled the Arab traveler Ibn Jubayr in the Middle Ages about his coreligionists who preferred to live under the Crusaders.7 Muslim schizophrenia is nothing new. The East is not treating its ills with the right remedies. It is mired in superstition and sterile chauvinism, when it is not importing the worst dregs of Europe, such as the red and brown dystopias of the 20th century. Is the

East, therefore, beyond redemption? “To flatter oneself that one will transform barbaric Eastern governments into Western-style governments is a false and dangerous conception,” wrote Jules Ferry, for whom liberal democracy was a lost cause in these lands, so close to home.8 The author of these lines cannot resign himself to the world from which his ancestors came remaining mired in utter decay. He will therefore celebrate the day when the East defies this prediction; when Pakistan vies with Canada for the title of champion of minority rights; when French editorialists condemn the excesses of feminism in Afghanistan; when Algeria is overwhelmed by visa applications; when Sudan becomes a haven for arts and letters; when Switzerland protests against the exodus of its talent and capital to Mauritania; when Mayotte requests its annexation to the Comoros to benefit from their wealth; where Iran will lecture America on its prudishness toward blasphemers; where the Maghreb will taunt Israel by boasting of hosting a hundred times more prosperous Jews than the Jewish state has Arab citizens within its borders. But he is scandalized to see that this day is far off, that the conditions for its arrival are not in place, and that bloodthirsty superstitions win the support of Muslims in the rare moments when they can go to the polls. Worse, not content with having ruined the East and transformed the cradle of civilization into its tomb, Islam exports obscurantism to societies that took centuries to free themselves from it. In Europe, diasporas are reintroducing the customs their ancestors fled and, through their faith, are degrading the edifice built after so many sacrifices and for which so many exiles lost their lives. “A segment of Muslim immigration in Europe suffers from oikophobia, hatred of the place where one lives,” observes the Spanish writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte. Marx asserted that history repeats itself first as tragedy, then as farce. The pressure that Islam exerts on the West echoes the slow alteration, before disappearance, of ancient Greco-Roman and Eastern civilizations following Muslim expansion. European complacency in the face of this obscurantism is all the more appalling. “The great phenomenon of our time is the violence of the Islamic surge,” prophesied the writer and resistance fighter André Malraux, comparing it to Soviet totalitarianism, while

deploring our tendency to underestimate it. Blinded by religious amnesia, Europeans underestimate the danger of Islam, when they don't expect the native to remain this “noble savage,” frozen in a backward setting, to satisfy a contemptuous thirst for exoticism. They have erased from their memory the era when religion dictated every facet of life and refuse to believe that the devout could destroy our societies. Lulled by the comforts of prosperity and modern freedoms, Westerners consider them immutable gifts from heaven. They forget the virulence of past struggles to wrest them from the clutches of superstition and theocrats. Who remembers when Montesquieu bluntly proclaimed that “the Muslim religion, which speaks only of the sword, still acts upon men with that destructive spirit which founded it”? The irreverence that philosophers displayed toward the most dangerous religions makes contemporary nationalist and secular activists seem far too moderate. Our societies lull themselves with the words of Marx, for whom religion is merely “the sigh of the oppressed creature,” not the howl of the oppressor. But history abounds with emancipated peoples under the banner of wisdom: absurd beliefs are not the only remedies for the trials that all prosperous peoples have had to overcome. It is still necessary to destroy the barbaric relics and other myths “that condemn enslaved and superstitious nations to baseness and ignorance.” This “Islam of Enlightenment,” which our storytellers keep harping on about, is as illusory as Stalinism with a human face. Although championed by brave activists, this project gives too much weight to superstition, leading Muslims astray from the truth: like many religions, the message of Islam is not the work of a god, but of forgers who lived between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in the vicinity of the Arabian Peninsula. “Linguistics, critical history, philology, and archaeology are indeed all fields that contradict the religious idea that the Quran is a perfect and divine text.” Let us heed the advice of the writer Boualem Sansal and relegate these fetishes to a museum. The Orient has not always been Muslim. He would do well to open his eyes to the cataclysm that was the irruption of the followers of Muhammad, who stole him away from more refined worlds. By freeing himself from the deceptions of the

one whom Diderot designated as "the greatest enemy that human reason has ever had," he would not only be doing the whole world a service. He would attain the true peace to which societies aspire. For this, it suffices to send the false gods and prophets back to the bad dreams from which they arose.

1 The World of Yesterday: Memory of an Oriental

Forgetting, and I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation. Ernest Renan "The natives profess the Christian religion [...]. They use the same first names as we do; for men, John, Peter, Andrew; "for women especially Mary," reported the Portuguese explorer João de Castro in 1541, in front of the vestiges of fallen Christianity, and since disappeared, which he discovered south of Yemen and Arabia, on the island of Socotra 1. An unusual presence in the eyes of ordinary mortals, victims of this terrible confusion between Arab and Muslim. “Arabs are all those for whom the central event of history is the mission of Muhammad and the memory of the Arab Empire, and who, moreover, cherish the Arabic language and its cultural heritage as their common possession,” wrote the orientalist Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, as if the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula did not exist before Muhammad and had waited for him to awaken them from their historical lethargy. Muslim writings have constantly falsified Arab history to persuade people that Islam was preached to backward nations. From this arises the Stockholm syndrome to which the world is captive: “Islam was the vital impulse that revealed to the Arabs the potentialities and latent forces that resided within them,” states the Syrian thinker Michel Aflaq, a figure of Arab socialism and nationalism, despite being born into a Christian family and having studied at the Sorbonne. These tales recycle the Muslim propaganda equates the pre-Islamic East with the Jahiliyyah: an era of barbarism and backwardness. The ancient East is to Islam what traditional Africa is to Victor Hugo: a region without history. The historian Henri Lammens noted that the narratives of Muslim tradition can be considered one of the greatest "historical hoaxes recorded in literary annals." Islamic mythology likens ancient Arabia to "a world almost entirely isolated, a hard and pure seed in the midst of putrid humus, from which the immense tree of the Muslim world was to spring forth." Farewell to the happy Arabia dear to Pliny the Elder, overflowing with perfumes and riches, with its hydraulic works, its dams, its canals, its irrigated agriculture, its ports, its markets, its sculptures celebrating the fortune of its merchants, its renowned

pearl industry, its trade with the Mediterranean world and the great empires, its cities adorned with magnificent temples and palaces, and its opulence which excited the greed of the first Roman emperor, to the point that he launched an expedition which would fail miserably. 8 The geographer Strabo recounts in the 1st century AD: He had considered negotiating an alliance with the Arabs or securing the submission of this people by force of arms. Another reason had determined him: he had heard praise for the wealth of this people, who traded their perfumes and precious stones for the gold and silver of other nations, without ever spending or selling anything outside of what they received in payment. He therefore had every reason to hope to find in the Arabs either wealthy friends capable of helping him with their treasures, or wealthy enemies easy to defeat and plunder.9 And yet, the calumnies that have disfigured the Arabian Peninsula have colonized the collective imagination through their persuasive power. From the depths of the island where he was exiled, did not Napoleon credit Muhammad with having civilized these barbaric and idolatrous Arabs? “He was addressing savage, poor peoples, lacking everything, and quite ignorant.” If he had spoken to their spirit, he would not have been heard. 10. This colonial fable not only conceals the plagiarisms that Islam committed to preserve the myth of a miraculous revelation that appeared ex nihilo. 11. It murders a second time this crossroads of civilizations, whose splendor and memory are buried beneath the desert. Proof of this is that they inspire no literary or cinematic production similar to that which, across the Atlantic, condemns the destruction of the Native American world by the white man. 12. And the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, from his sad tropics, 13. reflected: “Islam already disconcerted me with an attitude toward history contradictory to our own, and contradictory within itself: its concern to establish a tradition is accompanied by a destructive appetite for all previous traditions.” Thanks to the Palestinian-American professor Edward Said and his critique of Orientalism riddled with errors, lies of omission, and defamatory accusations,14 it is fashionable to heap scorn upon those Europeans who supposedly bombarded Muslim societies with

degrading stereotypes for the sole purpose of enslaving them.15 But what about those who, more modestly, consigned the brilliant civilizations they supplanted to the dustbin of history? “I speak of societies emptied of themselves, of cultures trampled underfoot, of lands confiscated, of religions murdered, of artistic magnificence annihilated, of extraordinary possibilities suppressed,” lamented the poet Aimé Césaire on the effects of European colonialism in every corner of the world.16 Far more appalling is the record of Islam. The Gravediggers of the Orient. Traveling through Ottoman Greece during the Age of Enlightenment, the French diplomat Choiseul-Gouffier was astonished by the indifference of the Turks to the vestiges of civilization which they crushed under their weight and whose groans tore at the hearts of enlightened men: "It seemed to me that the sight of so many precious masterpieces should have made the most ferocious hands drop their weapons, opened the most stupid eyes to admiration." 17. The Muslims, despite encamping amidst the works of Phidias, among so many other wonders, remained unmoved by the history of the nations that bequeathed these fabulous ruins. Such was the observation of Chateaubriand, who endured the mockery of an ulema during his own journey to the land of Aristotle: "This Turk could not understand that I left my homeland for a simple motive of curiosity." While Victor Hugo, unbeliever though he was, praised the Alhambra of Granada as "the palace that geniuses have gilded like a dream and filled with harmonies," neither the Nabataean city of Petra and its magnificent temples carved in stone revealed to the world by the Swiss Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, nor the temple of Isis and its colonnaded avenue, nor any of these ancient sites and other jewels scattered on the North African coasts moved these Muslims who nevertheless lived alongside them for more than a millennium. Their gaze was so captivated by Mecca that they ignored the heritage lying beneath their feet, leaving it to the infidels to unearth it, like the hieroglyphs, which waited until the arrival of the Frenchman Jean-François Champollion to be deciphered in the 19th century. The American orientalist Bernard Lewis noted: “When the first European Egyptologists, and other archaeologists, began to excavate in the Near East, many of the

local inhabitants found it incredible that foreigners would agree to spend so much time, effort, and money, and to run so many risks and endure so many privations, only to unearth and decipher the ancient relics of their own forgotten ancestors.” The lack of enthusiasm shown by Muslims for archaeology and the pre-Islamic world belongs to those calamities that signal that Muhammad did not triumph only on the battlefield. He also won the war of memory after a vast cultural cleansing, obscuring the roots of the conquered peoples. Just as it was said that a convert to the religion of Muhammad had become Turkish, even though the Turks themselves embraced all the universal religions before ending up under the rubble of Islam, popular consciousness "retained that the true Arab, faithful to his origins, was above all the Muslim Arab," notes the orientalist Maxime Rodinson. Seduced by this prejudice, it forgets that "history has known the Arab ethnicity for twenty-nine centuries and that for fifteen centuries it followed paganism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and especially Christianity." Even in France, where communalism arouses mistrust, the duty to honor the subjects of the French colonial empire who fought during the Great War – defying the Ottoman call for holy war against France and its allies – resulted in the intrusion of a mosque in the heart of the Latin Quarter, like a reminiscence of past tragedies, when the Roman Empire yielded to the legions of Muhammad in Africa and the East: “We want Muslims to rediscover here the forms which, in their native land, enchanted their eyes, the images of their thousand-year-old civilization, full of splendor and mystery, ardent and serious, brilliant and contemplative,” exclaimed the Prefect of the Seine at the inauguration of this building which, over time, became the fifth column of the Algerian dictatorship.24 The native is assigned to his Muslim status when he could have been glorified as a member of any other community worthy of esteem. No one protests against the tragedy that makes the Orient the natural and eternal home of Islam, while the plundered, buried, and forbidden cultures of the peoples who fell under its yoke do not elicit the melancholy they deserve. A resounding triumph for the gravediggers of the Orient! Until the day it recovers its memory. Weary of the chains of oblivion, its peoples will rise up to

reconnect with the era when their lands exhaled the scents of incense and knowledge, when their cities vibrated with unparalleled grandeur. They will remember, with hearts heavy with nostalgia, that time when Gaza, adorned with its opulent vineyards, was celebrated by a Greek chronicle as “a distinguished city that has everything in abundance and ships throughout Syria and Egypt good quality wine.” They will remember the schools of this city, which once resounded with the voices of rhetoricians, where the art of speech prevailed over that of perishing under the banner of Hamas, where disciples learned to weave speeches sharper than blades. They will evoke Tyre and Sidon, those Mediterranean jewels whose purple workshops dyed the robes of emperors, where ships, laden with riches, danced on the waves of the Mediterranean, before modern conflicts troubled their shores. They will reenact these Byzantine spectacles for laughs alongside the actors and actresses who ridiculed the clergy, and praise the audacity of Byzantine women who ventured out of their homes to own perfume shops, dairies, or cabarets, while the most daring among them ventured into maritime trade. In their dreams, Yemenis will see again the fields of aromatic herbs and the swirls of incense that were the glory of their lands, before the Houthis planted their ominous flags and their missiles replaced the sacred fragrances. Beirut will be reborn in their memories as a beacon of law, where Roman jurists honed their minds before the city became, under Hezbollah's control, a shadow of its past. They will mourn Palmyra, its gigantic theaters where the most moving tragedies resounded, where the children of the aristocracy recited Aesop's fables alongside marble statues, before the darkness of ISIS came to desecrate its stones. Egypt, cradle of wisdom, will once again become in their stories the guardian of the Library of Alexandria, that sanctuary where the world's knowledge converged, before the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi was brought there by the ballot box. They will remember with pride the Arabs who gave Rome emperors and empresses, such as Philip the Arab and Julia Domna. They will sing of Arabia of old, mother of Jewish and Christian kingdoms, allies of Ethiopia, Persia, and Byzantium, where Justinian, dazzled by the valor of Arethas,

elevated him to the rank of phylarch. The Nabataeans will return to nurture their visions, with their caravans laden with myrrh and their cities carved from rock, where architecture rivaled poetry. They will remember Qatar as the home of Isaac of Nineveh, the saint who preached charity for all creatures in a world where compassion still seemed possible. The amphitheaters of Athens, where the Arab rhetorician Callinicus clashed with his rival and compatriot Genethlius, will replace Mecca in the hearts of pilgrims. So too will the dunes of the Negev, where the verses of Virgil were whispered while the maxims of Epicurus echoed through the streets of Apamea. In the heart of this Africa, which the poet Juvenal called the mother of the most eloquent lawyers, Carthage will once again resonate in their memories as a crossroads of the most brilliant poets, musicians, and philosophers of Latin civilization, where, from the acropolis of Byrsa and its imposing forum, they debated the lessons of Cicero, for whom liberty without equality is but a mirage, before grappling with the elections of future magistrates. They will remember Timgad, in Algeria, where the senator Marcus Julius Quintianus Flavius Rogatianus, in a burst of generosity, endowed the city with a magnificent library, a refuge for souls thirsting for knowledge, while at the same time it rivaled other African cities in erecting the most beautiful monuments. Antioch, which Libanius called the "Athens of the East," will spring forth again in Their stories are like a marketplace of ideas and wonders, where silks, spices, and the finest goods in the world flowed. They will celebrate Mavia, the Arab Catholic queen who defended Orthodoxy against the Arian emperor Valens, before coming to the aid of Constantinople against the Goths, when they were nothing more than vulgar pagan barbarians. They will see King Abraha commissioning Byzantine craftsmen to build a splendid cathedral on the shores of Arabia. They will hear the praises of Abdiso of Merv, the metropolitan who announced the conversion of two hundred thousand Turks to Christianity, and of Ahoudemmeh, the cleric who brought the good news to the Arab tribes. They will remember the Tanukhids, those fierce resisters of Muhammad's legions, and the Ghassanids, whose court, adorned with myrtle and jasmine, resounded with Greek songs, while their sovereigns,

surrounded by gold and silver vases filled with ambergris and musk, were intoxicated by poetry. Juba II, a Berber king steeped in Greco-Latin culture, will be reborn in their tales as a scholar whose intelligence illuminated the shores of Mauretania. They will see again the little schoolchildren of Tripolitania, sitting in the shade of olive trees, reading Homer's poems, their high, thin voices carrying the Iliad to the heavens. They will unearth the schools that taught their children grammar with the prose of Demosthenes, instead of the Koranic institutions that pollute their minds. They will envy the Roman villages of their ancestors, enclosed by vineyards and dotted with graceful brick houses with mosaic floors, where murals once magnified the most famous biblical scenes, before being swallowed up by the legions of Muhammad. On that day, the East, awakened from its long slumber, will mourn the lost centuries, but in its tears will shine the hope of renewal. Its peoples will then unearth the blessed time when they were wedded to the Hellenic world, from which they were separated after the tragic expropriation facilitated by the epidemics, natural disasters, and conflicts that weakened Persia and the Roman Empire. This same expropriation is praised by Hamas when it hopes that Islam will eliminate Israel “as it eliminated what came before it.”37 Is this disdainful tone toward the civilizations replaced by Islam not the most striking proof of the stupefaction into which it plunges its followers? In Iran, the chadors that disfigure faces and streets mar this Persia which was once the home of the Nestorian Church and the lost teachings of Zarathustra, where mosaics celebrated female musicians before they were thrown into dungeons, while bold reformers like Mazdak dared to defy their time by proposing the social equality of all free men.38 The very name of the Islamic Republic of Iran dishonors this glorious past where Nestorian Christians and professors from the school of Athens, driven out by Byzantine and Justinian orthodoxy, found refuge in Persia and benefited from the protection offered by Sassanid rulers concerned with cultivating the arts, sciences and philosophy at their highest level,39 to the point of translating Greek science into their language. Contrary to the legend that celebrates Cyrus the Great's act of allowing the Judeans deported to Babylon to rebuild their

temple in their homeland, the calls for the destruction of Israel emanating from Tehran sound like a warning. They remind us how civilization is a reversible process. Perhaps it is to conceal this disturbing truth that these self-proclaimed students, the Taliban, destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan. They must erase the striking contrast between Afghanistan and the works that Central Asia produced centuries before the arrival of Islam! The only thing missing is for Afghans to flock en masse to the small village of Hadda, marvel at the bas-reliefs depicting musicians, awaken to the achievements born from the fusion of Buddhism and Hellenism, and recall the readings of Sophocles that took place in the small town of Ai Khanoum, before they are finally scandalized by the level of decay to which their region has sunk! The Genie of Flowers and the works that escaped Islamic fanaticism by finding refuge in the Musée des Arts Asiatiques in Paris, by their very existence, deliver a resounding rebuttal to Muslims who claim that their religion regenerated the Orient. The same is true of the Buddhist sculptures discovered in the Peshawar region of Pakistan. Whether they are dancing, admiring themselves in a mirror, or playing the vina, the Yakshini and their sparkling gaze invite us to wonder what Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sindh, and all Eastern societies would have become if pre-Islamic cultures and their memory had not been displaced by superstition. The Turks would flock to this Buddhist literature, which their king Taspar Kaghan had translated into their language fifteen hundred years earlier, while he was building numerous monasteries dedicated to this wisdom.41 The Maghreb would be among the most parliamentary, literate, and industrious regions in the world. Lebanon's robust economic health would arouse the envy of the Swiss, who would nonetheless rush to invest their savings there to stimulate the most innovative industries in the Middle East. The Mediterranean would be united by a vast area of free movement of goods, services, people, and capital, instead of being a mass grave separating two worlds that regard each other with suspicion. The Sudanese would vie with the Ethiopians for the title of Rome's closest ally in Africa after bitter, bad-faith disputes, instead of tearing each other apart. The Balkans would finally be celebrated

as a harmonious mosaic, not feared as a dangerous powder keg. Armed with their republican songs, the Chechens would join forces with the Ukrainians to bring down Vladimir Putin's dictatorship. Kabul and its gigantic Buddhist temples would be on the verge of dethroning Paris as the world's most popular tourist destination, instead of eliciting the pity of philanthropists. Yemen would be less preoccupied with sabotaging international trade than with intelligently leveraging its position to challenge Silicon Valley for the title of the world's leading technology hub. The Comoros would showcase to the world splendid amphitheaters designed by Hellenized Arab and Persian travelers, among other elements of its opulence, instead of the ruined mosques that stand amidst this desolate archipelago. India and Pakistan would compete less on the battlefield of artillery than on the meditation of Ashoka's tolerant maxims. Placed under the patronage of their ancestor Rabban Sauma, the Uyghurs would support Taiwan in its democratic struggle against Chinese dictatorship. The universities of the Sahel would be at the forefront of the fight against climate change and the greening of the Sahara, while the Louvre Museum would redouble its efforts to win back visitors lost to the art galleries of Timbuktu. At the same moment, Louis-Sébastien Mercier's utopia would take shape: Turks and Greeks, united in their disdain for fanaticism, would applaud Voltaire's Mahomet, performed under the secular vaults of Hagia Sophia, finally reconciled with the Enlightenment.43 Resurrecting the Orient: Superfluous Uchronias? "The reconstruction of history, as it did not happen, is always futile," objected the Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui to the arrogant individuals tempted to lecture peoples who had supposedly gone astray. Following this logic, we would never finish reprimanding the peoples of the earth, because each of them, in one way or another, has always made a bad choice. If a Maghrebi were to rewrite the history of France or England from the point of view of the Celts, showing their negativity, their inauthenticity, he would be laughed at, and yet that is what learned scholars do at length, under the pretext of friendship. 44 Nothing is more foolish than this relativism which lumps together all the cultural upheavals that history records. Despite the world's

affection for the Gauls immortalized by Uderzo and Goscinny, no one would dare deny that the Romanization of Gaul allowed it to attain a more refined way of life, through the systematization of writing, the introduction of land surveying, among other innovations that some would have preferred to see spread peacefully.45 Anyone who would say the same about the Islamization of the East would have to hire the most cunning lawyer on the planet. Nothing is more evident than the fact that the followers of Muhammad confiscated the genius of the East. One would have to be heartless not to be outraged by Mesopotamia, which witnessed the reintroduction of sexual slavery by the Islamic State several millennia after it had invented writing, agriculture, the city, and the first tablets of law. One would have to be made of stone not to weep for Libya, ravaged by Gaddafi and militias centuries after Theodore of Cyrene expressed his skepticism toward all the gods there, while his compatriot Eratosthenes measured the circumference of the Earth. One would have to be unbearably frivolous to accept Algeria, mired in tyranny fifteen hundred years after Saint Augustine denounced unjust kingdoms as vast gatherings of brigands. One would have to be deranged not to long for Syria, where mosaics, millennia before Bashar al-Assad and Al-Julani, encouraged newlyweds to give their children this philosophical education personified in the form of a graceful woman. One would have to be criminally amnesiac not to be saddened by this Anatolia occupied by Erdoğan centuries after it gave birth to the first global indictment against slavery, delivered by Gregory of Nyssa.48 One would have to be blind not to long for the return of that province of Gaza where the ascetic Isaiah loved to discuss Aristotle with his friend Aeneas, far from the bombs that tarnish the memory of studious monasteries.49 “Cleopatra’s nose, had it been shorter, the whole face of the earth would have changed,” wrote Pascal.50 Let us hope that our Muslim friends, in turn, will ask themselves what our world would be like if Muhammad had never left his cave.

2 The Myth of the Islamic Golden Age

Remember, Quintus, that you command Greeks who civilized all peoples by teaching them gentleness and humanity, and to whom Rome owes the enlightenment it possesses. Cicero. “Without the valor of Charles Martel, we would be wearing turbans today,” wrote Chateaubriand. A legend credits this Frankish military leader with having saved Europe from the Muslims after the destruction of Visigothic Spain. The Scottish historian Edward Gibbon writes: “The Saracens had continued their triumphal march for more than 400 leagues, from the Rock of Gibraltar to the banks of the Loire, and, having gone another 400, they would have reached the borders of Poland and the mountains of Scotland […]. The schools of Oxford would today be explaining the Quran, and from their pulpits they would be demonstrating to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Muhammad.” The genius and fortune of a single man spared Christendom these calamities. But some argue that the importance of Poitiers has been overestimated at the expense of the eastern front. At Poitiers, the Franks encountered only a band of soldiers raiding beyond their furthest borders, thousands of kilometers from home. They overcame a force that had, in reality, already reached its limits and was already exhausted. The Greek defenders of Constantinople, on the other hand, had to confront the elite of the Caliphate armies, launched from inland bases in a large-scale attack against the enemy capital. Europe's bulwark against Islamic imperialism was that Eastern Roman Empire, forgotten by history, which succumbed after eleven centuries to the assaults of the Turks due to its internal strife and the treachery of the Western powers, before perishing once again under the blows of their ungrateful commentary. Did not Montesquieu summarize a thousand years of Byzantine history as "a fabric of revolts, seditions, and perfidy"? The repressed legacy: The Eastern Roman Empire, it is true, harbored profound flaws within itself. Not to mention the questionable customs that flourished there, the squabbles over the nature of Christ and the right to depict him, while Constantinople was under attack from Muslims and Bulgarians, are among the most distressing chapters in its history.6 Yet, anti-Byzantine clichés fail to grasp the role of this

civilization in preserving ancient knowledge and its contribution to the wealth of the East under the early caliphs. The same is true of the Renaissance, which some are quick to attribute to Islam, without explaining why it did not originate within it. “European culture, on an intellectual level, is merely a later development of some of the most important phases of Islamic culture,” wrote Muhammad Iqbal, the spiritual father of Pakistan. But then, how can we understand that neither the Renaissance, nor the Reformation, nor the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, nor the Enlightenment, had the slightest impact on the Islamic world, which didn't even notice them? Those who fabricate stories like to credit Islam with the achievements of the cultures it encountered and absorbed, ignoring their brilliance before the arrival of Muslims. “Islamic civilization is now taught and studied with almost total disregard for the Near East in which it was born,” lamented the orientalist Patricia Crone. Is it because a clearer picture of this region before Islam would tarnish the latter's prestige? While staying in 17th-century India, the French traveler François Martin noted that "the Muslims do not like to be told of any beauties other than those they have at home." And yet, Islam did not seize a desert and cultivate it from scratch. The disastrous situation in the present Near East makes us forget that this region had already reached a very advanced stage before Islam spread there in the 7th century.11 The historian Rémi Brague notes: The scholars, the philosophers, the founders of religions of post-classical Antiquity rarely came from Greece, even less from what would later become "Europe", but rather from Egypt ("Hermes Trismegistus", Ptolemy, Plotinus), from Syria-Phoenicia (Zeno of Citium, Nemesius, Poseidonius, Jesus of Nazareth, Iamblichus, Porphyry, Syrianus, Damascius), from Anatolia (Paul of Tarsus, Dioscorides, Galen), etc. It was also in this region that the principles of Judaism and Christianity were defined: halakha in "Babylonia" (Iraq) by the Sages of the Talmud, and orthodox dogma in Alexandria or Cappadocia by the Church Fathers.12 Muhammad was not yet born when the young Hypatia, whose gifts as a philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer had surpassed him since Alexandria before she was killed by fanatical Christians,

while Gadara, Tyre, and many other Levantine cities shone with such splendor that even their necropolises, adorned with mythical sculptures, defied the darkness of death by carrying beauty beyond the heavens.13 The Muslim conquerors stole from Constantinople "the richest and most populous provinces of the ancient world east of the Mediterranean," namely Syria and Egypt, where philosophy and the sciences flourished. practiced for centuries 14. Mesopotamia, which invented agriculture, writing, the first cities, the oldest codes of law, that is to say civilization, came under their control. The Muslims destroyed the Sasanian regime and seized Persia, which had become a refuge for pagan scholars and Nestorian Christians enamored of classical culture whom Constantinople had expelled.15 As a result, Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, Persia, and part of India were united for the first time since Alexander and for a longer period than his reign, along with major centers of classical culture such as al-Hira, Harran, and Merv.16 Through their conquests, the Muslims also acquired the Chinese art of papermaking, an advance that gave them a decisive advantage in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, an advantage that Europe would not experience until the 12th century! Establishing themselves in such fertile lands represented an immense privilege for the Muslims. It was still necessary to appropriate its fruits. 17. Cultural Appropriation. Aware of the value of these fruits, the Islamic-Andalusian historian Sa'id al-Andalusi referred to the Greek philosophers and scientists as "the highest-ranking men, the most respectable scholars; this is due to the genuine care they demonstrated in cultivating all branches of knowledge, including mathematics, logic, natural philosophy, and theology, as well as the political sciences that deal with the home, the family, and society as a whole." He recounts, concerning Caliph al-Ma'mun: "He sought out knowledge wherever it was found and, thanks to the loftiness of his conceptions and the power of his intellect, he brought it out of the places where it was hidden. He entered into relations with the emperors of Byzantium, gave them rich gifts, and asked them to donate to him the philosophical books in their possession." These emperors sent him copies of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, Ptolemy, and

others that they possessed. Al-Ma'mun then selected distinguished translators and entrusted them with the task of translating these works to the best of their ability. […] At that time, the Abbasid Empire almost rivaled that of the Romans at the height of their splendor and power.18 Thus, despite a broader openness, Arabic science is "nothing other than the continuation of Greek science," as the orientalists Louis Massignon and Roger Arnaldez remind us, clarifying that "it is understood that when we say Arabic science, we do not mean Muslim science."19 The Arabs and Arabic speakers who contributed to the flourishing of literature, the arts, and the sciences were not necessarily Muslim. And it is indeed the Greek heritage that would form the “framework of scientific thought” in the first societies to fall under Islamic rule.20 While Europe sank into the Dark Ages, while classical culture eroded and knowledge of Greek was lost, Muslims seized, from the very beginnings of Islam, “the oldest crossroads of civilized men and peoples in the world,” as the historian Fernand Braudel reminds us, for whom the biography of the Muslim world begins less with the preaching of Muhammad than with the interminable history of the Near East.21 The historian Gabriel Martinez-Gros is therefore quite lenient with the Muslim world when he describes its failure compared to the West, even though these “sister civilizations initially had the same starting points.”22 The reality is even more damning. Like Aladdin seizing the magic lamp, Muslims were offered a treasure of inestimable value. They simply needed to gather the immense riches available to them to make them prosper. Endowed with an exceptional legacy, they possessed the most precious heritage humanity could conceive. What did they do with it? Everything destined the Orient to become the sanctuary of beauty and truth, the cradle of the most refined peoples, whose industries and knowledge would have permeated the far reaches of the world. Islam should have swept away superstitions, overthrown tyrannies, and raised the human soul to unparalleled heights. The Muslim world, by virtue of the grandeur of its heritage, was destined to lead the nations, eclipsing all others in the fields of economics, culture, and science. The proof of the unforgivable squandering of the Orient lies in this unanimous nostalgia for the

times when the arts, sciences, and philosophy flourished there, as if to underscore the contrast between this glorious past and its decline. “Islam is not entirely impervious to the light; it has often embraced certain sciences and arts. Why should we not seek to cultivate these under our rule?” asked Tocqueville, witnessing the decay of a region prey to European appetites.23 But, much to the chagrin of both the devout and the Islamophiles, Muhammad’s contribution to the splendor of the societies that fell under his rule is entirely debatable. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s: Can we speak of the Muslim world to refer to the Orient of the first caliphs? If we consider the Muslim expansion during the first three centuries in general terms: We observe that the conquest launched after Muhammad’s death, and which lasted until the mid-8th century, aimed to subjugate territories held by infidels to Islam, and not to Islamize the inhabitants of these territories […]. The expansion was territorial and political; it was not “religious” in the sense that the conquerors had no intention of proselytizing.24 The first caliphs feared the conversion of the conquered populations: in theory, it would have allowed them to achieve fiscal equality and escape heavier taxes than those levied on Muslims, at the risk of reducing the conquerors’ revenues and privileges.25 It was less out of tolerance than out of pragmatism, a sense of caste, and greed that the Muslim powers refrained from resorting to forced and mass conversions. In the Umayyad East, Muslims constituted only a small minority, “the Arabization of populations, especially in urban areas, not always being synonymous with Islamization,” as historian Jean-Pierre Filiu points out. A majority of the population, especially in Syria, "remains Christian, even though discriminatory taxation against the People of the Book constitutes, in the long term, a powerful incentive for conversion 26". As the historian John Tolan writes: These Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, which are wrongly called the Muslim world, were multi-confessional and multicultural empires [...]; The caliph's society was becoming Islamized, but Muslims remained a numerical minority for centuries to come.27 While not denying the notion of Muslim civilization, Rodinson concedes that it has the drawback of obscuring the fact that Jews and Christians played a significant role in the prestigious

creations and most of the cultural features of the area dominated by Islam,28 beginning with the Arabic alphabet, which is believed to have been created in the early 6th century at the initiative of, or with the assistance of, ecclesiastical authorities for missionary purposes.29 Even before Islam, it was primarily Christians and Jews who taught Arabs in schools where they learned to read and write, and it is a fact that in Medina, where Jews were the schoolmasters, writing was more widely practiced than in the purely pagan parts of the peninsula.30 The Christians of Iraq constituted the second major source of talent to supply administrative posts during the second Abbasid century, 31 while their coreligionists were still the majority in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia until the first Crusades. 32 “I would like to revisit the question of decline and understand the gap that separates early Islam from present-day Islam, to grasp the causes that led from splendor to misery,” wondered the Franco-Tunisian writer Abdelwahab Meddeb, a fierce enemy of the fanaticism that is poisoning his native culture. 33 The Islamic scholar Anne-Marie Delcambre notes: Muslim intellectuals remain inconsolable over the disappearance of Islam’s golden age, forgetting that this golden age was not exclusively Muslim, that it was the result of cosmopolitanism, of foreign contributions from India, Persia, and China, and that it is a complete heresy in relation to original Islam and Islamic culture. Medina. The brilliant civilization that developed between the 9th and 12th centuries in the courts of metropolises like Baghdad, Cairo, Isfahan, Cordoba […] was largely foreign to religion.34 What if the brilliance of early Islam lay primarily in its weakness? Given their demographic weight, the contribution of non-Muslims to the flourishing of the arts, literature, and sciences in the East under the early caliphs was decisive. While Saladin and the Arabs did not teach Europeans how to build cathedrals, contrary to what a French politician claimed,35 Muslim chroniclers report that Caliph al-Walid desperately sought the help of Byzantine artisans to decorate mosques in Damascus and Medina, even threatening Constantinople with the destruction of churches in Muslim lands if they refused. Two centuries later, Caliph al-Hakam II dispatched an embassy to the Byzantine Emperor

Nicephorus Phocas with the mission of bringing back to Spain a mosaic specialist to oversee the decoration of the Mosque of Cordoba.36 In the field of science, the Maghrebi historian Ibn Khaldun acknowledged in the 14th century that Eastern Christians were the principal agents in its transmission to the new Muslim class, even if he neglected the Jews and the Sabians. Formerly adherents of a rudimentary way of life, the Muslims “conceived the desire to study the philosophical sciences, because they had heard of them from the bishops and priests who administered the tributary peoples.”37 Syriac authors, who had continually read, translated, and commented on Greek philosophical and scientific works, were transmitters of Hellenic culture, but also of Sasanian culture, particularly in 9th-century Baghdad. Was not the philosopher Al-Farabi a student of the Nestorian Christian Yohanna ibn Haylan? Were not the first medical works in Arabic written by Christians, who dominated Arabic medicine from the 8th to the 10th centuries? And what of the great movement of translating Greek sciences into Arabic that made the Abbasid dynasty famous? For the orientalist Dimitri Gutas, this movement, which involved patrons, both Muslim and non-Muslim, "constitutes, by all possible criteria, a landmark in the history of humanity," to the point of being comparable "to Periclean Athens, Renaissance Italy, or even the scientific revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries." But these comparisons are symptomatic of a naive Orientalism that detects open-mindedness where careful examination suggests greater caution. How Islam mutilated the heritage of the Orient: Nothing could be further from the truth than the commonplace notion that the intercultural exchange between Islamic culture and Greek civilization was “global, spontaneous, and without any trace of red lines.”41 The curiosity of Muslim scholars for ancient knowledge focused primarily on utilitarian disciplines, marginalizing historical writings, theater, and literary works, which the Spanish philologist Américo Castro likened “to the most direct path to entering into a situation of collective life, into the vital experience of existence, as the texture of life and horizon of values.”42 Contrary to Napoleon's assertion that Muslims translated the Iliad and the Odyssey, no Greek poetic,

dramatic, or historical work was translated at their request, as the American orientalist Franz Rosenthal points out. Unlike the Renaissance, Greek art held little fascination for Muslims due to Orthodox distrust of painting and sculpture, depriving humanity of countless works. As for Greek political thought, Bernard Lewis reminds us that it had only a limited influence on the Muslim world: "Muslim political writings analyzed according to Greek principles are marginal in Islam, where the authority of the Qur'an and the traditions of the early Muslims predominated." For example, the philosopher Averroes never got hold of Aristotle's Politics, as it had never been translated into Arabic. Europeans would have to draw on... to Byzantium to access this literature of such great scope. Muslims would never want to hear of the maxims and political reflections of Hesiod, Solon, Cleisthenes, Herodotus, Pericles, Socrates, Archelaus, or the Stoics and their successors.48 They would never study the Roman philosophers and jurists,49 among other precursors of republican, democratic, and liberal institutions.50 Moreover, the Greco-Arabic translations, in which some detect a remarkable open-mindedness, were driven as much by a partial curiosity for ancient knowledge as by the profound contempt that Muslims showed for their linguistic support. Unlike the Germanic peoples who entered the Western Roman Empire and adopted its language, or the Mongols who converted to Islam after sacking Baghdad in the 13th century, Muslim scholars, with a few exceptions, have always refused to learn the languages of culture such as Greek, Latin, Coptic, or Syriac, despite their strong presence in the regions that came under their rule. This is why the Greek-Arabic translations were primarily the work of Christians, “all trilingual, speaking Arabic for daily life, Greek for literary culture, and Syriac or Aramaic for the liturgy,”52 and who would ultimately be rewarded a thousand years later with a forgotten genocide.53 “Knowledge of languages is the gateway to wisdom,” believed the 13th-century British Franciscan Roger Bacon, who himself studied Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew. The comparison between the attitudes of the Muslim and Roman elites toward the heritage of Greece is all the more revealing. Historians have never celebrated a great movement of translation of Greek works into Latin in Rome: this

undertaking was unnecessary for Roman scholars who mastered the language of Homer by virtue of the admiration they felt for a culture which they had the humility to judge more refined than their own. The Roman Quintilian in the 1st century AD conceded: I am of the opinion that the child should begin with the Greek language, because Latin being more commonly used, habit makes us learn it, so to speak, in spite of ourselves; Secondly, because tradition dictates that one should first study the Greeks, who were our predecessors in all the sciences.54 And, while the Romans never replaced Greek with Latin in the Greek-speaking regions that came under their rule, these languages disappeared with the Islamization of the regions conquered by Muslims and the decline of the non-Muslims capable of cultivating the ancient heritage, without this purging arousing the slightest remorse. It is inappropriate to celebrate two centuries of translations that the learning of Greek would have rendered unnecessary, especially since they were undertaken to definitively bury the Hellenistic world after having mutilated its most essential elements: political and legal ideas. But history is such that it readily neglects what disappears in order to emphasize what continues.55 Some have taken offense at the emphasis placed on the religion of the translators and commentators who educated Muslims and elevated their language to the status of a scientific language: the confessional dimension is deemed futile since Syriac speakers were simply more capable of using Arabic, another Semitic language.56 This does not explain why Muslims did not learn Syriac and why, in general, even highly educated Arab Muslims knew only Arabic. The importance of the religious criterion for defining the profile of these transmitters of knowledge becomes clear when the orientalist Bernard Lewis notes, regarding Muslims: “For them, using the script of infidels was tantamount to a kind of act of impiety, and indeed, few learned a foreign language.” Non-Muslim languages were unknown, except for what converts to Islam had brought back […]. Before the 18th century, no Muslim scholar or man of letters seems to have sought to learn a Western language, much less to develop a grammar, a dictionary, or other linguistic tools. Translations are few and far between. Those we

know of concern works chosen for utilitarian purposes and are the work of converts or non-Muslims.57 The contempt for non-Muslim languages and cultures was based on a saying attributed to Muhammad, who warned that “whoever imitates a people becomes one of them,” as if to signify that the good Muslim must disdain the institutions of the unbelievers. “Do not set God equal, become Muslims! Do not dress in the fashion of foreigners!” Muhammad’s official poet is said to have ordered a converted tribe.58 This disdain for the customs and traditions of non-Muslims reflects the spectacular indifference that Muslims cultivated toward their subjects and neighbors, including Latin Europe, its conflicts, history, geography, institutions, customs, technology, philosophy, and literature. They cannot boast of having felt for Europeans even a tenth of the curiosity that the latter cultivated for Islam or other civilizations, to the point that European studies on the Near East at the end of the 18th century “already far outpaced those of the Muslims themselves.”59 The Muslim East, confirms Maxime Rodinson, “had far less curiosity toward the Christian West before the 18th century than the latter had toward it.”60 The Golden Legend and the Myth of Transmission: During a state visit to Morocco in 2024, the French president, who had described French colonization in Algeria as a crime against humanity, took the liberty of praising the legacy of the Muslim conquest in Spain: “The years of Al-Andalus made Spain and southern France a fertile ground for exchange with your culture,” declared Emmanuel Macron before the Moroccan Parliament. There would thus be good and bad imperialism. Although refuted by specialists, the myth of Andalusian cosmopolitanism has enjoyed considerable success with the general public. One thinks of the Egyptian director Youssef Chahine and his film Destiny, which won an award at the Cannes Film Festival. He paid homage to Averroes, at the risk of overestimating the tolerance and skepticism of the man who, certainly in accordance with the values of his time, wrote: “Everyone must submit to religious principles, follow them, and not doubt those who are rooted in them.” For denying and discussing them renders human existence meaningless, and therefore heretics must be killed. 62 Now, not content with having exiled

Averroes, Islamic Andalusia reduced the infidels, once the majority, to the rank of residual elements, before the latter succumbed to the fanaticism of the Almoravids and the Almohads: "The Jews and the Christians had the choice between adopting Islam or dying. “Some converted to Islam, and the rest were put to death,” recounts the historian Ibn Athir regarding the entry into Tunis of the Almohad caliph Abd al-Mumin.63 The latter continued the rigorous work of the Berber reformer Ibn Tumart, who could no more tolerate the presence of women in public spaces than that of musical instruments, which he eventually banned.64 Practicing a methodical form of historical amnesia, Muslim chroniclers in Spain shroud the indigenous populations in a disdainful silence: “The place allotted to the vanquished people is therefore minimal, limited to a few figures from the time of the conquest, witnesses to a bygone era,” writes the historian Cyrille Aillet.65 They constitute a “forgotten community” from the 11th century onward, while Latin literature died out in the 9th century. Far from the myth of intercultural dialogue, Andalusian Muslims felt complete indifference toward the Christian kingdoms of the North, which nevertheless threatened them from the 11th century onward.66 The data suggest that there were “few opportunities for encounters between Christian scholars and Muslim intellectuals of al-Andalus during the time of Averroes.”67 Having returned to Latin rule in 1085 at the end of the Spanish Reconquista, Toledo became a major center for the transfer of Greco-Arabic and Islamic knowledge to Europe. But, contrary to what the proponents of the “transmission” of Arab sciences suggest, there is no discernible desire among Muslims to bring science to Europeans shrouded in ignorance, along the lines of the Institut d’Égypte founded at the end of the 18th century by those Frenchmen whom the Arab scholar Al-Jabarti described as “particularly pleased to see a Muslim visitor take an interest in the sciences.”68 The translations of knowledge held captive in the Muslim world at the time of the Spanish Reconquista were the sole product of European initiative and were carried out, once again, through the intermediary of Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians, much to the dismay of the Sevillian magistrate Ibn Abdun, who condemned the sale of

scientific manuscripts to non-Muslims. “Let us therefore, in accordance with the Lord’s command and with his help, strip the pagan philosophers of their wisdom and eloquence, let us strip these infidels so as to enrich our faith with their spoils,” exclaimed the 12th-century English scholar Daniel of Morley, seeking to dismantle the barriers of knowledge. At the Roman Curia, clerics educated in Arabic were present as early as the 12th century. The English scholar Adelard of Bath returned from his sojourn in Syria fluent in Arabic. Latin Europe discovered the Quran in the 12th century thanks to Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, despite the prohibition against non-Muslims learning the sacred text of Muslims under the so-called Pact of Umar, for fear that the infidels might learn to criticize Muslim dogma.71 The creation of centers of learning for Arabic scholars became a concern for the Franciscans, Dominicans, and the papacy from the 13th century onward. The first Latin-Arabic glossary dates from the 12th century and was initiated by Europeans. One of the first books printed in England in 1477 was a collection of quotations from sages translated into various languages from an Arabic original,72 while a chair of Arabic was established in Paris in 1529 and then in Cambridge in 1633. A Hellenomania also emerged among Europeans, leading them to appropriate a whole historical, philosophical, artistic, and political heritage held by the Byzantines, some elements of which remained unknown to Muslims.73 The myth of an open culture. No such initiative appeared in the Islamic world, which “did not seem curious about the West, its Latin culture, its vernacular languages, its theology, its intellectual or technical knowledge.”74 For the historian Olivier Hanne, Muslims had “too much confidence in the sciences emanating from Baghdad and in the Arabic language, an idealized vehicle of the divine, fixed in its perfection, to be interested in texts written in Latin, a language subject to evolution and corruption.” On the contrary, the Arab-Andalusian Christian Hafs ibn Albar used the writings of Saint Paul and the duty of Christians to spread the Gospel in all the languages of the world as a pretext to overcome his coreligionists' reluctance towards linguistic pluralism.75 In Syria, "throughout the Crusades, the Arabs refused to open

themselves to ideas from the West [...]. In fact, many Franks learned Arabic, while the inhabitants of the country, with the exception of a few Christians, remained impervious to Western languages," notes the Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf, now Permanent Secretary of the French Academy. He attributes this closed-mindedness to the colonized position in which Muslims found themselves,76 without explaining why non-Muslims exposed to Islamic domination hardly adopted the same attitude, but abandoned their indigenous traditions in a multitude of regions. “Christians have even forgotten their language, and out of a thousand of us you will scarcely find one who knows how to write a proper Latin letter to a friend,” lamented Alvaro of Cordoba around the mid-9th century in a now-famous letter.77 In Egypt, Bishop Severus of Ashmunein deplored in the 10th century being forced to have his works translated, with great difficulty, from Greek and Coptic into Arabic due to the decline of these ancestral languages.78 In the eastern Maghreb, the use of Latin is attested in inscriptions up to the 11th century in Kairouan and was eventually supplanted by Arabic, without Muslims deeming it necessary to adopt Latin and Roman literature. The Muslim conquest of North Africa annihilated the Christian culture of Late Antiquity. Local Christian communities, heirs to pre-Islamic traditions, thus disappeared in the Maghreb at the beginning of the 12th century.79 Once populated by Hindus, along with Buddhists, Jains, Christians, a few Jews, as well as Parsis or Zoroastrians who fled Persia after its Islamization, the Indian subcontinent experienced, with the arrival of Muslims, a movement of conversion that Islamist currents underestimate, preferring the myth that Indian Muslims are immigrants.80 The Muslim Ghurid dynasty sounded the death knell for a declining Buddhism in India, its cradle, by perpetrating the sacking of the universities of Nalanda and Vikramashila.81 Another center of Buddhism, Afghanistan, witnessed its decline as Islam progressed and vanished under the rule of the Ghaznavids.82 So many cultures trampled underfoot. during this venerable Islamic golden age! In sub-Saharan Africa, Christian Nubia, established in the 6th century, collapsed nine hundred years later, weakened by the

intrusion of Arab-Muslim elements. In 14th-century Egypt, the brutal deterioration of the Coptic situation led to the destruction of a large number of churches and monasteries, and marked the definitive reversal of the numerical ratio between Christians and Muslims.83 In Anatolia, the population relinquished its Greco-Christian identity, weakened by the collapse of Byzantine institutions following the Turkish conquests, so that the Islamization of Asia Minor was practically complete by the 15th century. Consequently, many Turks believed they were descended from the conquerors who had stolen Anatolia from the Greeks.84 In the Balkans under Ottoman rule, the bulk of conversions took place in the 16th and 17th centuries.85 But, for their part, the Turks remained indifferent to entire swathes of European culture until the 18th century: The Ottoman Empire pretended to ignore Western Europe, which it considered distant, harmless, as devoid of attraction as it was of interest, hardly deserving of attention. Ruling over a vast and diverse world, convinced that they were the center of the universe, the Ottomans could not imagine having to concern themselves with a continent of such little importance. If, nevertheless, they needed to know some realities of the land of the infidels, their usual informants—Jewish and Greek Christian merchants of the empire, renegades, or foreign diplomats stationed in Istanbul—were sufficient to satisfy them. Neither the European languages, too numerous and scorned as barbaric dialects, nor the history or geography of Western states were deemed worthy of interest [...]. No curiosity was shown for the political or social life of the inhabitants of the "land of the Franks" [...], no interest in their manners and customs.86 And this was true even when European advances were visible, as we read in the writings of Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century: "We have recently heard that in the lands of the Franks, that is to say, in the land of Rome and its dependencies on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, the philosophical sciences are flourishing, their works are being revived, study sessions are more frequent, assemblies are understanding, interpreters are numerous, and students abound."87 This did not prevent the Turks from missing the humanist, scientific, and technological revolutions that would

erupt on the continent they had nevertheless encroached upon until the 20th century. Used respectively from 1493, 1567 and 1627 by the Jews of Salonica, the Armenians of Constantinople and the Greeks, what Archbishop Berthold of Mainz referred to in the 15th century as "the divine art of printing" was shunned by Muslims until the 18th century 88. The orientalist Albert Hourani notes that Copernicus is not mentioned in Ottoman writings before the 17th century, and even then only incidentally 89. "Aristotle, whom you love so much, is no longer in fashion. “Now the ideas of a certain Frenchman called Descartes Efendi dominate all thoughts,” wrote Nedim Hoca, secretary to Mehmed Çelebi, ambassador sent to Paris, to the imam of the Ottoman sultan in 1730, nearly a century after the publication of Discourse on Method 90. This weakens Emmanuelle Tixier’s thesis, for whom the interest in foreign cultures “is generally only conceivable in a situation of domination, when one’s own bases are sufficiently solid for the Other to appear as a pleasant and exotic object of study 91.” Persistent sectarianism. This sectarianism has not finished wreaking havoc, if we are to believe this report published by Arab intellectuals under the auspices of the UN in 2002, which deplored that the Arab world translated five times fewer books into Arabic than Greece translated into Greek, and that the number of books that the Arabs translated in the last twelve centuries corresponds to that which Spain translates today in a year. Based on UNESCO data, the Dutch researcher Ruud Koopmans maintains that between 1979 and 2014, approximately 41,000 books were translated into Arabic, Turkish, Farsi and Bahasa Indonesia, that is to say into the four most important languages of the Islamic world with a total of more than 500 million speakers. By comparison, just over 300,000 titles were translated into German and 111,000 into Dutch during the same period. Five million Finns had more translated books than half a billion Muslims. 28,000 books were translated into Korean, and 13,000 into Arabic, although Arabic is much more widely spoken than Korean.93 This cultural xenophobia was eventually highlighted by Edward Said: “What gives us pause is that in the United States, for example, there are dozens of centers for the study of the Arab-Muslim

Orient, whereas in the Orient there is no institution specializing in the study of the United States, which has a decisive influence on the economy and politics of the region.”94 Tellingly, Europe’s curiosity about Muslims was not always appreciated by them. “We were deeply moved and grieved,” wrote the 18th-century Turkish diplomat Vasif Efendi, upon discovering the presence of Muslim Quranic, legal, and theological manuscripts in the hands of non-Muslims at the Escorial Library in Spain, instead of appreciating their value to his culture.95 Therefore, caution is warranted when considering the pronouncements of Edgar Morin, who, along with the Islamist Tariq Ramadan, extols the supposed “tradition of openness and tolerance96” of pre-modern Islam, on the grounds that the Muslim minority did not annihilate the non-Muslim majority the moment it fell under its rule, or that the Ottoman sultans demonstrated a pragmatism that Europeans long lacked in their dealings with the Jews expelled from the Old Continent.97 This idealized legend seems designed to console us for the revolutions that Islam has missed. The question of women is not exempt from this rewriting. The archetype of the liberated woman that director Youssef Chahine portrays in his Muslim Andalusia clashes head-on with this statement by Averroes: “Our social organization does not allow us to glimpse what women can do for themselves. They seem exclusively destined to give birth and breastfeed. This state of servitude has destroyed in them the capacity to achieve great things. This is why we do not see a single woman among us endowed with moral virtues: their lives pass like those of plants, in the service of their husbands. This is the source of the misery that devours our cities, given that women outnumber men by a factor of ninety-nine.” The relevance of these grievances becomes clear when we observe the views that Muslims and Christians respectively held regarding the condition of women in their rivals during medieval times. In Syria, the surprise of a German pilgrim at these noble Muslim women who "are strictly guarded by eunuchs and never leave their homes except on the orders of their husbands" contrasts with the astonishment of Muslims at these European women who move about as they please and – horresco referens – freely converse with men other than their husbands.

The Syrian prince Usâma Ibn Munqidh is astonished by this licentious attitude: If one of them is walking in the street with his wife and meets another man who takes her aside to speak to her privately, the husband steps aside and waits until the conversation is over; If it lasts too long, he leaves his wife with her companion and goes away. 100. When he goes to Africa, the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta does not fail to be scandalized by the few Muslim women he encounters who converse with men without being veiled, but casually discusses the treatment of adulterous women in an Asian country that some place in present-day Burma: 101: The sultan orders all his servants to rape her one after the other, in his presence, until she dies, then she is thrown into the sea. 102. From the Middle Ages to the modern era, the licentious condition of non-Muslim women is a cliché among Muslim observers, who seem disturbed by the slightest sign of freedom, if indeed this term is appropriate to designate the pre-modern female condition. The Arab thinker Al-Jahiz referred to Byzantine women as the most immodest in the world because they were not circumcised,103 while the philosopher Abd al-Jabbar expressed astonishment that “Byzantine women are not veiled and, once married, they walk among people in the marketplace with their heads and faces uncovered, displaying all their beauty,” when he did not accuse them of being free to commit fornication outside of marriage before leaving the family home.104 The first Ottoman ambassador to Paris under the Directory, Morali Seyyid Ali Efendi, described his visit to the library of the École Centrale de Lyon in this way: “It is a well-lit place, composed of two long wings […]. As the place in question was occupied by women, we did not stay there long.” Examining the customs of the country, he judges that the esteem and honor the French show toward women are extraordinary: Even if a woman of humble origins enters an assembly of noblemen and high-ranking officials, the head of the assembly rises, offers his seat, and, bowing to her, seats her and remains standing.105 Putting an end to “the crisis of Islam”: “Islam is a religion that is experiencing a crisis today, all over the world,” declared Emmanuel Macron on October 2, 2020, provoking the ire of a Muslim world that still refuses to question itself.106 This

commonplace, however, contains a weakness. A crisis following a period of enlightenment—this fiction—discourages the Muslim world from subjecting its roots to critical examination and from tracking down the regressions that have occurred with its expansion. Leaving aside the idealization of Muhammad, it is laughable that Muslim memory speaks of his first four successors as “rightly guided” caliphs. Equally ridiculous is the attempt, as Al-Jahiz does, to portray this period as an era free from “criminal acts or scandalous innovations, gestures of disobedience, jealousy, resentment, or rivalry,”107 when Muslim sources present a picture of a world riddled with deadly rivalries from its very beginnings.108 Murder was rife in these early days of Islam. The killing of three of the first four caliphs hardly paints a flattering picture, and there would be more.109 Of course, it would be foolish to reduce fifteen centuries of Muslim history and its relations with its neighbors to a mere litany of assassinations and raids. A civilization guilty of the worst atrocities as well as the most sublime achievements does not deserve to be defined by a single epithet, since it has never subjected its existence to a single principle.110 Far from being limited to war, relations between Islam and its neighbors allowed for a certain degree of trade, offering the latter the opportunity to discover a wealth of innovations and goods born from the genius of the former.111 Undoubtedly, Muslim societies were also cradles of remarkable minds, whose works surpassed those of their ancient predecessors and enriched humanity in a multitude of demanding scientific disciplines. Al-Khwarizmi and Avicenna, to name only two of the most celebrated figures in the Muslim world, left an indelible mark on history through their contributions to mathematics, optics, and philosophy. The architects of the Taj Mahal, like countless geniuses from the Muslim world, magnified the human condition through their creativity.112 The philosopher Al-Kindi proclaimed: We should not be ashamed to find the truth beautiful, to acquire the truth wherever it comes from, even if it comes from races distant from us and different nations; for one who seeks the truth, nothing should come before the truth; the truth is not lowered or diminished by the one who speaks it or by the one who brings it, and no one falls from grace because of the

truth, but everyone is ennobled by it.113 It remains to explain why this beautiful declaration had less resonance in the Muslim world. It is necessary to explain why some of the greatest talents born within its fold, such as the philosopher Averroes or the physician Ibn an-Nafis, to whom we owe the discovery of blood circulation in the 13th century, have enjoyed greater renown outside the borders of Islam, while falling into oblivion within their own community. Given the considerable heritage that Muslims have inherited, producing Al-Kindi or Averroes was the very least one could expect. Among the Chinese, the Indians, and the Muslims, there are undoubtedly good fathers, good husbands, docile and grateful children, and subjects loyal to their rulers; and good people would be more numerous among them, as among us, if they were well governed and if a wise policy, instead of having them taught senseless religions from childhood, gave them equitable laws and taught them a pure morality, uncorrupted by fanaticism. This is what Paul Thiry d'Holbach, a major figure of the Enlightenment, noted in a book initially directed against Christianity.115 Therefore, for every Averroes whom chance placed in the Muslim world, how many other Averroeses, Leonardo da Vincis, Pierre Bayles, Condorcets, or Auguste Rodins were systematically murdered in the classrooms of Koranic schools, whose creation in the 11th century by the Turks coincides—curiously—with the beginning of the stagnation of thought in the land of Islam? According to the Islamic scholar Charles Pellat: It was in trying to preserve Arab-Islamic culture that the Seljuks dealt it a mortal blow by creating the madrasa around the 5th century AH. Previously, education had not been absolutely free, far from it, but anyone could take their place in the circles that formed around a famous teacher and choose the subjects they wanted to study. From the moment when professors, appointed by the authorities, are officially installed in establishments created by the government and controlled by its agents, when teaching licenses are officially granted to students, when finally this official teaching is intended to train professors, ulema and officials necessary for the administration of taxes and justice, not only the subjects taught but also the methods become official and closely monitored.116 Is it a coincidence that the

apogee of Muslim Spain coincided with the breakup of the Caliphate of Cordoba, two centuries before the appearance of the first Andalusian madrasas in the 14th century,117 and that the great achievements of the Abbasids occurred at a time when "no religious view had crystallized to the point of being able to receive the name of orthodoxy"118? This is perhaps why Renan believed that “Islam was liberal when it was weak, and violent when it was strong,” even though the defrocked seminarian was no more lenient toward Christianity, without anyone accusing of Christianophobia the man who profaned the life of Jesus and reminded us that we should not thank religions for achievements that arise in spite of them.119 Far from inviting us to revere Islam, every prodigy born in the Muslim world compels us to mourn the a thousand times greater talents that would have emerged if the East had not succumbed to the siren call of Muhammad and if the Arab conquerors had integrated into indigenous cultures instead of replacing them. Nothing justifies attributing to Islam the ingenuity that Eastern scholars displayed as human beings endowed with reason and sensitivity. Ibn Khaldun himself refuses to credit Muhammad with the curiosity the East has shown for these disciplines: “The intellectual sciences, being natural to man insofar as he is a being endowed with reflection, do not belong specifically to any one nation.” The fascination these disciplines exert on the human mind stems from the fact that man “naturally aspires to knowledge of these subjects.” This does not, alas, prevent the historian from declaring a few lines later that “philosophy is a vain science in itself and harmful in its application” on the grounds that it makes one resistant to the Quranic message “and contains principles contrary to divine law.” With a few exceptions, most scientists in the lands of Islam had “no connection with theologians or religious figures in the broadest sense,” notes the historian Ahmed Djebbar, who also points out that their work rarely referred to the Quran. Between the surgeon Abu Al-Qasim and Muhammad, to whom Muslim traditionists have attributed absurd remedies; between the astronomer Ibn al-Saffar and the Quran, which disseminates geocentric conceptions of the universe, there is the same distance that separates Socrates from hemlock. To

credit Islam with the achievements born within it stems from the same logic as applauding the Indigenous Code, the Soviet regime, or slavery on the grounds that French capital built railways in Algeria, that the Russians sent the first satellite into space, or that all slave societies have known captives of low birth who have managed to rise socially, like Petronius' Trimalchio, the Mamluks, or the Janissaries: it is to applaud flawed systems in the name of benefits that could have been multiplied tenfold by more liberal institutions than the era allowed. Just as we do not revere the human sacrifices of the Aztecs on the grounds that tomatoes come from the New World,123 the achievements of the East that have elevated humanity are foreign to Islam as a system of norms and values, which has ultimately stifled free thought in the countries where it has taken hold. Driven by the conviction—which persists to this day124—that all truth is contained in the Quran, that nothing has been omitted from it, that its message is absolute, and that it is impossible to stay on the right path without its intercession, its most literal adherents have relentlessly intimidated minds tempted to reason outside its confines.125 They believed they could insert philosophy […] into Islamic law and link Islamic law to philosophy. However, this constitutes an aspiration on the path of which the obstacles are insurmountable: Islamic law comes from God through a messenger between Him and humankind, by way of revelation.126 This is what the 9th-century philosopher Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani argued to explain the failure of the coexistence of Quranic law with the more liberal elements of ancient philosophy. The decline of Islam is best described by Muslims themselves. “Here the responsibility of the Muslim religion becomes fully apparent.” “It is clear that, wherever it has taken root, this religion has sought to stifle the sciences, and it has been marvelously served in its aims by despotism,” conceded the thinker Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in a terse tone during his famous debate with Ernest Renan on the causes of the decline of the Muslim world.127 It is fortunate that this religion has in no way shaped the institutions of Western countries.128 Those who criticize the tendency to over-Islamize Muslim societies and to blame all their problems on their religion, to the exclusion of other

factors, are forced to consider the possibility that Islam might be foreign to their achievements. Wouldn't that, moreover, be the highest compliment paid to Muslims who have distinguished themselves by their talent? The fact is that these people, for a time, displayed extraordinary genius despite lead weights strapped to their feet, and they would undoubtedly have equaled, or even surpassed, the most refined nations had they not been chained to Muhammad. Far from diminishing their achievements, this fact makes them all the more impressive. A Raphael who emerges in the midst of the Florentine Renaissance has less merit than a Michelangelo born among these Taliban, beside whom the darkest periods of the Middle Ages seem the height of refinement. To quote the Andalusian poet Ibn Bassam: “For one who finds himself in such a situation, the smallest pebble takes on the proportions of a high mountain, and the smallest puddle of water those of a raging sea.” This affair attacks our religion and destroys our power. We have heard the King of the French say that no one can nullify our religion, our law, and our power. Our law has made us masters of our negroes since the time of our Lord Noah. Mustapha ben Ismaïl, Algerian notable, facing the French colonizer "Polygamy has never been authorized in the West," lamented Napoleon, for whom this custom is a formidable bulwark against racism. In the East, on the contrary, it has always been permitted. Asia and Africa are inhabited by people of many colors; polygamy is the only effective way to mix them so that white does not persecute black, or black, white. […] Black and white, being brothers, sit and see each other at the same table. Thus, in the East, no color affects superiority over the other.1 Perpetuating the myth of an East at the forefront of the fight against racism, the historian Arnold Toynbee described Muslims as a community free “from all color prejudice toward races of a different color.”2 During his pilgrimage to Arabia in 1964, Malcolm X, a leading figure in the African-American cause, praised the interracial brotherhood he believed he witnessed in this land so holy that it was one of the last to abolish slavery under international pressure: “Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and such a genuine spirit of brotherhood as that practiced by people of all colors and races here,” he wrote, before

declaring Islam “the only religion that eliminates the racial problem from its society.” This raises the question of why Muslim societies exhibit some of the highest rates of consanguinity in the world, with significant consequences for public health. Tribal societies, where it is difficult to extend one's reach beyond the family, are indeed not the best placed to give lessons in anti-racism. “Their isolation is a sure guarantee against the corruption of blood that results from alliances contracted with foreigners […]” "Their race has also remained pure and without suspicion of mixing," wrote the Maghrebi historian Ibn Khaldoun about nomadic Arab tribes. 6. Them against us The golden legend of an egalitarian Islam has repressed the memory of ethnic conflicts that have affected all societies, although some have more difficulty getting out of them. This fable, however, clashes with the existence of a vast body of Oriental literature that reflects the ethnic disputes of the time, where an individual's genealogy is used as a pretext to either belittle or elevate them.7 The equal rights of non-Arab converts were at the heart of the controversies of the early centuries of Islam,8 during which numerous ethnic protests are recorded, such as the great Berber revolts of the 8th century.9 Like the bourgeois who invented an aristocratic lineage to gain access to privileges, it was not uncommon for converts to change their family name and invent an Arab genealogy to whitewash their past, increase their prestige, and escape discrimination.10 The Arabs, like conquerors throughout history, were reluctant to grant equality to conquered peoples and maintained their privileged position for as long as they could. Non-Arab Muslims were considered inferior and subjected to a whole series of fiscal, social, political, military, and other restrictions.11 Added to this struggle was that of mixed-race people for equality with native Arabs. All these struggles have been erased from memory because the majority of sources favorable to the non-Arab elements of the Muslim Empire “were destroyed by later powers who considered them a threat aimed at undermining Islam.”12 Faced with the demands of non-Arabs, the historian Ibn Abi Yala denounced these inferior nations who did not acknowledge the superiority of Muhammad’s ethnic group: “They do not recognize the Arabs’ right of precedence, nor do they

recognize their merit.” The 9th-century Arab poet Ibn Qutayba proclaimed that the members of Muhammad's family were destined by God "to be superior to all creatures, since He appointed the imams from among them, exclusively to them, without any other." Between the 12th and 13th centuries, the author Yaqut al-Rumi attributed—undoubtedly apocryphally—to Muhammad the idea that "nowhere in the world are there beings as repugnant as the Berbers." "The Arabs boast of being masters of the world and commanders of peoples. Why don't they boast instead of being skilled shepherds of sheep and camels?" “The Persian poet al-Rustami retorted in the 10th century to humble the pride of the sons of Ishmael.14 Trying his hand at ethnology, Al-Jahiz considered the Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Byzantines to be the four civilized nations of the earth. “As for the rest, they are savages or like savages.”15 Using freezing temperatures and cloudy skies as a pretext, Sa'id al-Andalusi described the Slavs, Bulgarians, and neighboring peoples as coarse, ignorant, indolent, lacking judgment, perspicacity, intelligence, and wit.16 Montaigne noted that “everyone calls barbarism what is not their own custom.”17 Muslims have not escaped this universal xenophobia 18. The myth of happy expansion Far from promoting the "happy fusion of composite elements 19", Islam forges a vast trade in captives outside its borders to supply sex slaves, domestic servants, artisans, soldiers and, to a lesser extent, agricultural workers. Imported from the Asian steppes, India, the Caucasus, Europe, or Africa, slaves were racialized and subjected to a stigmatizing, permanent, and hereditary classification.20 While Muslims did not invent slavery, the transatlantic slave trade—the long-distance trade in Black slaves—arose under the impetus of Islam, beginning in the second half of the 7th century, in response to the prohibition against enslaving free men within the Islamic Empire.21 Ibn Khaldun wrote: “Black nations are generally docile to slavery because they have little of what is essentially human and possess attributes quite similar to those of stupid animals.”22 Although not mentioned in the Quran, Muslims were the first to invoke the biblical account of the curse of Ham to justify the enslavement of Black populations,23 much to the dismay of

orthodox Muslims, who were forced to insist that only The unbelief of the non-believer who does not benefit from the “protection” of the Muslim state justifies enslavement.24 Thus, it was in the hope of escaping servitude that some sub-Saharan Africans could convert to Islam.25 “In principle, belonging to Islam protects against capture and enslavement, but this is a fragile protection that hardly withstands the interests of the powerful.”26 In the 14th century, the Black Muslim king of Bornu complained that the Arabs “have devastated our entire country, the entire country of Bornu […] they have taken free people from among us, those of our lineage among the Muslims […] they have taken our people like merchandise.”27 The first Black slaves imported into Europe through the slave trade "came from the trans-Saharan trade 28," even though we must put an end to the cliché that portrays Black Africa as a spectator that did not participate in the enslavement of its own people, as Pan-Africanist organizations do 29. Among the captives of the Atlantic slave trades, "about 2% were directly captured by Western slave traders, especially at the beginning, between the 15th and 17th centuries, when the trade was not yet truly organized. 98% of these captives were thus bought from African brokers 30." Regarding the trans-Saharan slave trade, the vast majority of captives "produced" in sub-Saharan Africa were taken by the powers that be, as Africans had never developed a sense of belonging to a single community before the arrival of Europeans.31 The 9th-century Arab historian Al-Yaqubi noted: "They export black slaves whom they capture, belonging to the tribes of Mira, Zaghawa, Maruwa, and other Negro races in their vicinity. I have been assured that Sudanese princes sell their subjects without any legal pretext and without any reason resulting from acts of war."32 The Manufacture of Innocence: While Islam was unable to erase racial divisions within the Muslim community, the most fundamental distinction between different segments of humanity remained religious. It separated what Muslim jurists have called the abode of Islam and the abode of war: Between the territory of Islam and the Land of War, there existed, according to the shari'a, the sacred law as formulated by classical jurists, a state of war, obligatory religiously and legally, which only the

conversion or subjugation of all humanity could end.33 In his Governmental Statutes intended to codify the obligations of the Muslim sovereign, the jurist al-Mawardi argues that the latter "must wage jihad, fight those who, after being invited to do so, refuse to embrace Islam, until they convert or become ḏimmi, for the purpose of establishing the rights of God."34 His colleague Abu Yusuf believed in the 8th century that it is not permissible for a governor to renounce fighting against a people at war if he has the upper hand over them.35 The Muslim world did not wait for Huntington to formulate his theory of the clash of civilizations for hostility to any value system other than its own to manifest itself within it. “In the Muslim community, holy war is a religious duty because Islam has a universal mission and all men must convert to it willingly or by force,” Ibn Khaldun observed.36 Yet, through a historical sleight of hand, Islam is portrayed as a besieged hamlet, aided by the Rousseauian prejudice that idealizes underdeveloped nations.37 In a famous work, the writer Amin Maalouf thus likens the famous Crusades to “the starting point of a thousand-year-old hostility” between Islam and the West: “In a Muslim world perpetually under attack, one cannot prevent the emergence of a feeling of persecution, which, in some fanatics, takes the form of a dangerous obsession […]. It is clear that the Arab East still sees the West as a natural enemy. Against it, any hostile act, whether political, military, or related to oil, is nothing but legitimate revenge.” And there can be no doubt that the rift between these two worlds dates back to the Crusades, which the Arabs still feel today as a violation.38 Undoubtedly, this alternative truth fuels “the formidable mythologizing of the Arabs by themselves, who always present themselves as eternal victims of History,” as the writer Cornelius Castoriadis observed.39 Leaving aside the legitimacy of an undertaking that the Church ultimately condemned, to elevate it to the genesis of tensions between East and West is to neglect earlier conquests. After all, Muslims hardly landed in Syria in humanitarian convoys. Was it not to liberate these regions, which had fallen into the hands of the Turkish invaders, that the first Western expeditions to the Levant occurred? “It is important that you come without delay to the aid of your brothers who live in the

lands of the East and who have already so often called upon your help," proclaimed Pope Urban II, imploring Christendom to act against a threat that has almost always prevailed. "Have you forgotten the lands you occupied and that we conquered in the past, and even very recently?" the Kurdish Sultan Ayyub challenged the future Saint Louis, throwing in his face the setbacks that Islam has inflicted on Christendom since its origins. This was before Muslim discourse adopted a victimhood stance to take advantage of Europe's amnesia. "For centuries you have been stealing and lying. You have come, you say, to civilize us?" "You have despised our languages, our cultures, our religions, humiliated our memories, defiled our traditions," sings Tariq Ramadan against the West, to which he blames all the world's ills to flatter the base instincts of his audience. By eclipsing the eradication of the ancient Orient, the occupation of the Iberian Peninsula, the Ottoman invasion of Central and Balkan Europe, the Emirate of Sicily, the occupations of Malta and Sardinia, the ephemeral presence in Narbonne, and the way in which Islam spread in Asia and Africa, the Islamist tragicomedy has set itself the task of concealing the fact that Islam has encroached more on its neighbors than the other way around. "Our Arab world has suffered this imperialist wave which took various forms, from the direct Portuguese conquest to indirect forms, such as the sending of missionaries to Syria, which then allowed the French to enter there," one could read in a history manual intended for Iraqi children which, in a burst of outrageous simplification, silenced the misdeeds of the Islamic world.42 The denunciation ad nauseam of a Western domination, which covers only 15% of the history of the Muslim world, contrasts with the indulgence towards the atrocities committed in the name of Muhammad during the rest of this period. "Arabs didn't naturally grow on the slopes of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco," Castoriadis quipped, emphasizing that this people, portrayed as oppressed, was nonetheless, like all nations recorded in the annals of history, a relentless conqueror.43 Selective Outrage The selectivity of Muslim memory reveals what everyone senses. Its grievances against Western civilization focus less on what this civilization did than on what it was: an

unbelieving civilization against which the Islamic Empire would forge its identity. From Syria, seized from Byzantium, the third Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik, adopted, as his first Islamic proclamations, formulas hostile to Nicene Christianity, to define the identity of his empire in opposition to the conquered world.44 He broke with the Greco-Arabic administrative bilingualism and excluded from the Damascus-based administration those who did not speak the language of the Quran. What historians Patricia Crone and Michael Cook have termed “the cultural expropriation of the Fertile Crescent”45 continued. “You will have to find your livelihood elsewhere than in this profession, for God has deprived you of it,” lamented the recently dismissed Byzantine official Sarjun ibn Mansur to a group of Christian secretaries.46 While some accuse the West of having invented a Judeo-Christian identity to define itself against Islam,47 “it was indeed at the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries that Islam clearly asserted itself against other monotheistic religions as the constitutive religion of the new empire,”48 accusing Jews and Christians of having falsified their scriptures to conceal the alleged prophecy of Muhammad.49 Under the Umayyads, “the Muslim conquerors formed an upper class, a kind of aristocracy placed under the spiritual and temporal authority of the caliph.”50 Inherent to the Islamic system, “discrimination would represent a permanent and necessary feature of Muslim society.”51 Non-Muslim communities are forbidden from bearing arms or riding horses, are subject to heavier taxation, must show deference to Muslims, cannot marry Muslim women, must be discreet in the practice of their religion, refrain from proselytizing, and are prohibited from building new religious buildings. Their testimony in court carries less weight than that of Muslims, among other daily humiliations.52 These discriminations, applied with varying degrees of rigor and cruelty depending on the time and place, are extended to Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Hindus, and other faiths as Muslims encroach upon their neighbors. Even more precarious is the status of heretics and freethinkers who mock the so-called revealed religions.53 “By saying ‘God,’ you are referring to an absent being. […] Why does he not allow himself to be seen and is content to

send messengers?” " objected the skeptical poet Abi al-Awja in the 8th century, before being executed by these supposedly tolerant Abbasids 54. But, if the Muslim world considered itself in a state of permanent war with its neighbors, the fact remains that the West remains the enemy par excellence. In the Muslim psyche, the struggle against Christianity became the prototype of holy war.55 It was in its name that the Barbary pirates carried out their attacks, infesting the Mediterranean and resulting in the enslavement of 1.25 million Westerners between 1500 and 1800, or the importation of nearly 2 million Ukrainians, Poles, and Russians between the 15th and the end of the 17th century by Crimean Tatars.56 "It is the enemy who designates you," the philosopher Julien Freund reminded pacifists, adding that protests of friendship are futile in the face of someone who hates you for who you are and not for what you do. The Maghrebi jurist Ahmad al-Wansharisi illustrates this attitude perfectly when he warns Muslims tempted to remain in a Spain returned to the Latin fold at the end of the Reconquista that even the tyranny of a Muslim government is preferable to the benevolence of a Christian government, in that living in a country under Christian authority exposes the Muslim to the risk of the dissolution of his faith in the meanders of mixing 57. The Muslim is invited to sacrifice his dignity on the altar of his religion, even when the institutions of the unbeliever are better. While passing through Syria during the Crusades, the Arab traveler Ibn Jubayr was indignant to hear Muslims preferring European rule—far from benevolent—to that of their coreligionists, fearing that a benevolent European administration would encourage Muslim apostasy.58 Here again, the danger lies less in the tyranny exercised by Muslim authorities than in the risk of seeing people turn away from religion because of the benevolence of their rivals. Did not La Boétie identify custom as the primary cause of voluntary servitude? Good and bad violence: Bearing a facade of anti-imperialism, Muslim memory displays unwavering bias and accommodates all forms of oppression as long as they are carried out under the banner of Muhammad. In the Muslim world, one sometimes gets the impression that the crime of imperialism is not—as it is for Western critics—the domination of

one people over another, but the distribution of roles within that relationship. The real, unacceptable evil is the domination of the infidel over the true believers. That the true believers should govern the unbelievers is fitting and natural, since the maintenance of the holy law is thus ensured […] but it is blasphemous and unnatural for the unbeliever to govern the true believer.59 The vassalages and tyrannies that the Arab-Muslim world suffered before and after the European invasions have thus been relegated to a minor corner of history. “Much to the chagrin of current revisionists, the Arab caliphate as the supreme institution of Islam lasted only three centuries,” Jean-Pierre Filiu reminds us.60 While the Baghdad caliphate was, before the arrival of the Crusaders, invaded and neutralized by Iranian and Turkish co-religionists, none of these Muslim peoples, who would nevertheless defile the supreme institution of Islam, was ever designated as its “natural and eternal” enemy. The massacres were forgivable, even if Muslims perished in them, “provided they were perpetrated in the name of the fascination with Islam.”61 Commenting on the appalling situation in Gaza on a French public television channel, historian Vincent Lemire twice dared to state that the terrible humanitarian crisis affecting the Levant and the Middle East was the worst since the Crusades, under the surprisingly complacent gaze of journalist Léa Salamé, who arrived in France to flee the 1962 Lebanon War. Besides the fact that this comparison, intended to make an impression, insults the memory of the victims of recent conflicts, starting with the half a million people killed during the Syrian civil war, these remarks are symptomatic of the blindness that downplays internal violence within the Muslim world, attributing it solely to its relations with the West. To be convinced of this, one need only point to the casual attitude that characterizes the treatment of the Mongol invasions that followed the European crusades and exposed the Muslim world to "massacres that eliminated so many faithful of Islam" to such an extent that they "could have been enough, in one region or another, to leave it bled dry and doomed to extinction." The cataclysms caused by the Mongols do not prevent one from reading on a well-known Islamist website that "the Islamic religion brought this people of the steppes

out of its darkness and barbarity, instilling in them respect for human life and a spirit of solidarity with other Muslim peoples." The pyramids made of tens of thousands of human skulls at the gates of Aleppo by the troops of Tamerlane—to whom the peoples of Central Asia lay claim—suggest a more nuanced view.65 The conversion of the Golden Horde and the Timurid dynasty to Islam seems to have erased their criminal record in the eyes of Muslims, despite the exterminations perpetrated by Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, which rival modern genocides.66 Once slaves of the Arabs, the Turks also benefited from the most-favored-nation imperialist clause. Consequently, the conditions of their penetration into the Levant and North Africa are often overlooked. From Damascus, the Ottoman Selim the Terrible dispatched a messenger at the beginning of the 16th century to Tuman Bay, the last sultan of independent Mamluk Egypt. He offered him two options: either he pledged allegiance to the Ottoman Empire and ruled Egypt as a vassal, or he resisted and risked seeing his kingdom crushed. Upon reading these conditions, Tuman Bay, knowing that surrender was out of the question, was seized with terror and burst into tears. Fear gripped his soldiers and soon all his subjects. To maintain order, a decree prohibited, under penalty of death, the sale of wine, beer, and hashish. But, if we are to believe the chroniclers, the anxiety was so great that the Cairenes ignored the prohibition and took refuge in drugs and alcohol to forget the imminent threat of invasion.67 The sack of Cairo, the pillaging of civilian property, and the violence with which the Turks established themselves in North Africa did not prevent Arab chroniclers from idealizing the tutelage that the Ottomans exercised over the Sunni world: Upon their rise to power, the Ottomans were among the best rulers of the Muslim community since the rightly guided caliphs. Vigorous defenders of the faith and adversaries of unbelievers, they extended their possessions through the conquests that God granted them and their representatives. They controlled the most prosperous inhabited regions of the Earth. Great and distant kingdoms pledged allegiance to them. They did not neglect the conduct of the state, but they ensured the security of the territory and its borders. […]

Their throne was stable, their power enduring, kings feared them, free men and slaves obeyed them. Thus wrote the Egyptian al-Jabarti when he faced France, as if to recall the blessed time when Islam imposed its tyranny, at the risk of embellishing the record of the Ottoman era.68 Right of inventory The writer Kamel Daoud notes that the Ottoman presence is not described as an occupation in Algeria. “It is merely referred to as a distant matter of a protectorate between Muslim cousins,”69 even though the Ottomans placed the Maghreb in a position of inferiority: Like all societies in the Ottoman world, the Regency of Algiers was characterized by being powerfully stratified and hierarchical. Below the Turkish military caste, which was at the top, came, in descending order, the Kouloughlis, or sons of Turks and local women; the urban bourgeoisie designated by the terms Moors and Hadars; the Arab tribes, among which a distinction was made between the makhzen tribes, who rallied to the regime and participated in tax collection, and the râ'iya tribes, themselves subject to taxation; then there were the Kabyles, mountain tribes, and finally the Jews and black slaves. Never missing an opportunity to remind France of its colonial past, while celebrating its Ottoman past, Turkey has managed to make people forget that it is under its tutelage that the Muslim world has accumulated a distressing backwardness, much to the delight of European appetites. “Alas! “It is in the West that the light of knowledge shines,” lamented the former minister of the Sublime Porte, Sadullah Pasha.71 Even today, there are historians, yearning for exoticism, who minimize the harmful effects of the Ottoman presence in North Africa on the grounds that it did not affect such respectable indigenous institutions.72 But what is the legacy of the Turks in North Africa? What did they leave behind besides the predatory culture that still persists there? In cataloging the Ottoman contributions to the Arab world, the historian Albert Hourani is captivated by the mosques, minarets, and other establishments financed by the Ottomans that allowed Cairo, Aleppo, and Tunis to remain major centers of Islamic law.73 Let those who lament the stagnation of science and philosophy in the lands of Islam take heart! While Spinoza was engaged in biblical

criticism, while Newton was studying physics at Cambridge, while the Physiocrats were laying the foundations of prosperity by advocating for free trade and industry, Turkish and Arab societies, thanks to the revenues they derived from piracy and the slave trade, employed numerous scholars who consumed time, ink, and paper writing books on the organization of the ideal city based on prescriptions attributed to an illiterate 7th-century Bedouin who believed himself to be acting on behalf of an invisible being. Did these works truly improve the lot of humanity? To the Turks' credit, the societies of the Maghreb were no more illustrious. Due to weak agricultural production, recurring famines and plagues, demographic stagnation weakened the Maghreb at a time when Europe was seeing its population increase.75 And, contrary to some legends, the Maghreb prior to the European presence was plagued by anarchy: "Maraboutic, Sharifian and tribal powers often emancipated themselves from the central power, when they did not completely ignore it." Thus, the orientalist Venture de Paradis observes: Most of the mountains, from the kingdom of Sûs to the plain of Kairouan, are populated by independent nations [...]; They paid neither tribute nor poll tax, yet they waged fierce war against each other and only united against a common enemy.76 A sign of the political instability that characterized the Regency of Algiers, "of the 30 deys who succeeded one another from 1671 to 1818, 14 were imposed by uprising after the assassination of their predecessor."77 This did not prevent it from waging war against Tunisia, making it a vassal state in 1756, and declaring war on it again in 1807 and 1813 when Tunisia broke its ties of vassalage. It is understandable why the Bey of Tunis sent a delegation to congratulate Marshal de Bourmont on his conquest of Algiers:78 everyone is someone's colonizer. Similar chaos reigned in the Indian subcontinent before its conquest by the British. This was the city where on every street there were houses and gardens, inns, cloisters, mosques, schools, and other places of learning, where scholars and doctors of law, soothsayers and learned people, saints and mystics, physicians, teachers, poets, and writers were found everywhere. But now […] I saw there the scene of terrible desolation, and was deeply grieved. Thus lamented the Urdu poet

Mir Hasan in 1761, observing the decline of his native region. As the orientalist Louis Frédéric indicates, the 18th century witnessed the annihilation of all that had, for two millennia, made India renowned. The country today still feels terribly the effects of this dark period in its history. Although some Indians are quick to accuse the British of having caused the country's ruin, the truth is that British control over India was merely the result of the political incapacity of both Hindu and Muslim leaders to restore order and peace.79 In the Indian Ocean, it was an island depopulated by wars and slave raids that the French purchased when the Sultan of Mayotte could no longer guarantee its security.80 A spirit of revenge: Internal conflicts within Islam did not escape the notice of some Muslim thinkers, who would have preferred that this energy be directed against other societies. If Muslims had adhered to the indissoluble bond of the caliphate, "we would be masters of the world," lamented the Syrian Rashid Rida.81 Clearly, imperial nostalgia does not elicit social disapproval in the lands of Islam. “Muslims have the right to be angry and to kill millions of French people for the massacres of the past,” declared former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, in response to the assassination of Samuel Paty and the attack at the Nice basilica. Like the descendants of Adam condemned by the fault of one, the French are now becoming the legitimate targets of fanatics by virtue of the real or supposed crimes of their ancestors, thus violating Frantz Fanon’s morality, which forbids attributing the crimes of the past to new generations: “I, a man of color, have no right to wish for the crystallization in white people of guilt toward the past of my race.” However, Mahathir Mohamad’s vengeful words leave us wanting more. He does not tell us when generations untouched by the misdeeds of their ancestors will be able to benefit from the statute of limitations to cease being slaughtered. Nor does he tell us whether, in exchange for the license to genocide that he grants to Muslims, Black people are authorized to enslave millions of Muslims in retaliation for past oppressions, or whether Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, and Serbs can massacre Turks to avenge Ottoman subjects who were victims of the devshirme system, under which "hundreds of

commissars went from village to village abducting, at a rate of one child per household, Orthodox Christian boys aged eight to sixteen or twenty, before being forcibly converted to Islam, circumcised, forced to learn Turkish, and subjected to a harsh selection process that determined their assignment." Mahathir Mohamad also doesn't tell us whether all the women of the world can avenge the concubines exploited for sexual purposes in those harems that scandalized humanists, like the Countess de Gasparin, who, during a stay in Egypt in 1848, was horrified by the fate of her "sisters of the East, deprived of everything that constitutes our happiness, our dignity, our individuality."85 These questions will remain unanswered. Everything indicates that the crimes committed by Muslims are not crimes at all. "It is only in the West, in Europe and the United States, that the Empire is despised, that people apologize for their imperial past. In other parts of the world, people are proud of their imperial past," notes the journalist Robert Kaplan.86 Muslim denialism forms the perverse mirror of the white man's lamentation. The mutilation of history by virtue of a Eurocentrism—naive or calculated—is embodied even in the singular form of "colonization." Putting an end to "colonization" is crucial. European expansion, which began in the 15th century, is presented as carrying a brutality foreign to other nations, as if they were cultivating their own gardens on the fringes of history while the Old Continent entered, for better or for worse, the age of great discoveries. "We will be beggars as long as we do not challenge their version of history." “Let us adopt the perspective of the Native Americans,” exclaims the indigenist essayist Houria Bouteldja, cultivating a vengeful memory by capitalizing on her audience’s ignorance.87 Curiously, this sympathy for the Native Americans does not extend to the pagans persecuted before the eyes of the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta, when he journeyed through Indonesia in the 16th century, praising the virtues of the local sultan: “He often wages holy war and launches expeditions against the idolaters. He is humble and walks to Friday prayers. His subjects […] love to wage holy war and willingly accompany their sovereign on his expeditions.” They subdue the idolaters who surround them and who pay tribute to live in peace. 88. Long before Columbus set foot

on American soil believing he had landed in India, the Turks had entered Anatolia and begun to fragment Europe. They would finally, in 1453, annihilate the "den of error" where "the malevolent clanging of the bells of the abominable infidels was replaced by the Muslim call to prayer, that sweet chant, repeated five times, of the Faith of glorious rites whose melody then filled the ears of the people of the Holy War," to quote an Ottoman chronicle on the fall of Constantinople.89 Muslim pressure exerted against European merchants was, moreover, one of the reasons that prompted the Portuguese and the Spanish to open new routes to India, with the well-known effects on the peoples they would encounter.90 At the very moment when the Spanish Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas was arguing that the Indians "have towns, villages, cities, and a political order which, in some kingdoms, is better than ours" to discourage the abuses of his compatriots,91 the Sultanate of Sennar, founded by the Funj, finished off the moribund Christian kingdom of Alodie 92, whose capital was located near Khartoum, while Sultan Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi launched a war against the Christians of Ethiopia 93. He was hailed as a hero in this Somalia which is difficult to call a country given the prevailing anomie. More than a century and a half later, when the English novelist Aphra Behn published Oroonoko, which features a Black slave who revolts in Suriname (1688), the Mughal Empire, under the reign of Aurangzeb, reached its greatest territorial extent after conquests that began in the early 16th century and unleashed a brutal campaign against Hindu communities: “Orders in accordance with the organization of Islam were sent to the governors of all the provinces to destroy the temples and schools of the Infidels, to put an end to their educational activities, and to cease the practice of the religion of the infidels,” reads a local chronicle.94 At the same time, the Ottomans failed to capture Vienna for the second time, with the active complicity of a France so absorbed in its struggle against the Habsburgs that it became a useful idiot for Turkish imperialism, which was only too happy to shatter the unity of the European front 95. Shortly before the French reprisals in North America against the Natchez, who had been guilty of massacres against the former, the Afghans led by

Sultan Mahmud Khan brought down Safavid Persia 96. The publication of Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* in the second half of the 18th century, which denounced European colonial barbarity and hoped for the advent of a "Black Spartacus," coincided with the death of Ahmad Shah Durrani, founder of one of the largest Muslim empires of the 18th century and considered, in Central Asia, as the father of the Afghan nation 97. Fifty years before Bonaparte's landing in Egypt, the Wahhabi sect emerged in the Najd, challenging Ottoman authority by giving birth—after two failed attempts, with their share of bloody battles, desecrated tombs, massacres against Shiites, and pregnant women—to the Muslim world. gutted – the Saudi kingdom, which has done so much to spread Muslim fundamentalism to the four corners of the world. 98. The 19th century did not only usher in the era of European imperialism. Ten years before the French invasion of Algeria came the conquest of Sudan by Mehmet Ali's Egypt to supply his army, his factories, and his fields with slaves. 99: "The caravans did not bring him enough; he wanted a larger and entirely his own trading ground. No sooner was he master of the Sennar than the population, the primary wealth of a state, was attacked at its very source," wrote Victor Schoelcher, for whom the Egyptian sovereign, anxious to present himself as a reformer to the West, "is nothing but a vile slave trader who engages in the trade with a cruelty equal to that of the most barbaric suppliers of the West Indies." 100. Then there were the major African jihadist movements, such as the expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate initiated by the Fulani reformer Usman dan Fodio, whose economy relied on slave labor fueled by raids.101 Historians Jan Hogendorn and Paul Lovejoy estimate that a quarter of the population of the Sokoto Caliphate—estimated at 10 million people in 1900—consisted of slaves,102 while its economic capital is said to have had thirty slaves for every free man,103 making this Sahelian empire one of the three great slave societies of modern history.104 Thus, there were more slaves in West Africa at the beginning of the 20th century than the Americas ever had.105 This did not prevent the Sokoto Empire from enjoying considerable prestige in Nigeria among a wider public. to the Boko Haram terrorists 106.

The Myth of the Global South All nations have an imperial origin. But only Western countries condemn their own. This is why the writer Kamel Daoud laments the absence, in the East, of a local "wokism" that would help it to examine its conscience 107. Invited on France Inter, the former French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin nevertheless asserted that "for a large part of the world's peoples, memory is that of colonization, of the tragedy of the colonial experience 108." It is a widespread cliché to make this collection of corrupt regimes known as the Global South the custodians of an anti-imperialist memory by virtue of their recent subjugation to the West. In reality, the vengeful native is nothing but a frustrated imperialist. He cannot forgive the unbeliever for having placed himself on the right side of the gunboat, for having attained this hegemony that he himself would have liked to exercise in all its rigor and without the guilty conscience that gives it a bitter taste. The weakness of his civilization is all the more unbearable to him because it contradicts his god, who proclaims Muslims as "the best of communities."109 From there to thinking that our world would have been more civilized if power had fallen into the hands of Muslims is but a step that only the fanatics take. "If Islamic civilization had ruled the West, we would no longer be forced to witness these savage acts, unworthy even of ferocious animals," we read in Khomeini's writings.110 Observing the Arab world, the Syrian thinker Georges Tarabichi noted that "the degree of hostility toward the Other has steadily increased as the Other has ceased to be a colonizer." And Tarabichi continued: Ethnicism as an anthropological phenomenon […] originates in the inability to integrate into the course of civilization and to heal the narcissistic wound that continues to exhaust the Arab self since it discovered itself, after the clash with the West, in a state of decadence reflected in the mirror of the Other who had achieved development. You said “civilization”? But is civilization reduced to wealth and technology? At the very moment when Muslim societies were eyeing Western techniques, Chateaubriand answered in the negative and denounced the naiveté of the eulogists of a modernized Islam: Will a new Orient be formed? What will come of it? Will we receive the deserved punishment for having taught the

modern art of warfare to peoples whose social order is founded on slavery and polygamy? Have we carried civilization outward, or have we brought barbarism into the heart of Christendom? […] I am not dazzled by steamships and railways; by the sale of manufactured goods and by the fortune of a few French, English, German, and Italian soldiers enlisted in the service of a pasha: all this is not civilization.112 For Edward Said, who castigates the prejudices against this almost irreproachable Orient, it is to the author of Memoirs from Beyond the Grave that we owe “the first significant mention of an idea which will acquire an almost unbearable, almost automatic authority in European writings: the theme of Europe teaching the Orient what freedom is, an idea which Chateaubriand – and all after him – believed that Orientals, and in particular Muslims, were totally ignorant of.”113 But, if he had truly been interested in the Orient, Said would have realized that these societies did not need Chateaubriand to be astonished, amazed, or scandalized by the liberality of Western institutions. Traveling through France during the Regency, the Ottoman Mehmet Efendi was astonished that the highest-ranking French noblemen showed “incredible courtesies to women of the lowest social standing, so that women do as they please and go wherever they choose.” During the Restoration, the Egyptian Tahtawi, despite his arrogant assertion that Europe had not “followed the straight path, nor taken the road to salvation, nor recognized the true religion and the path of truth,” was nonetheless impressed by the French ability to observe that “justice and equity are factors in the civilization of kingdoms, in the peace of men […] to such an extent that their country prospered, their knowledge multiplied, their wealth accumulated, and their hearts were at peace.” It was again the Egyptian, and not a pontificating Orientalist, who emphasized the differences between East and West regarding the condition of women. In a France where the status of women had deteriorated with the Napoleonic Code, he nevertheless judged that the men of that country “are slaves to women and submit to their will, whether they are beautiful or not.” Oriental women “are considered objects, while among the Franks, they are spoiled children.” Visiting the 1878 Paris Universal Exposition, the

Ottoman diplomat Sadullah Pasha exclaimed at the material benefits of liberal societies: “When you look at this fascinating display of human progress, do not forget that all these achievements are the work of freedom. It is under the protection of freedom that peoples and nations attain happiness.”116 For his part, the Turkish writer Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar praised the “intellectual treasures of the West” from which “we learned the love of thought, the love of freedom.”117 But this freedom was never to everyone’s liking. In Egypt, Jabarti did not hide his horror at the dissolution of traditional hierarchies and the social advancement of women brought about by the French presence: “We saw Muslim women dressed in the French style.” They went out with the district officials for inspections and matters concerning the population or for ordinary judgments, to command, prohibit, or issue appeals to the people. The woman went alone or with a few companions or invited guests of the same kind [...]. She was seen making decisions, commanding, and prohibiting. 118. Jabarti's fascination with French technologies does not prevent him from denouncing "the lie and the stupidity" of the Napoleonic proclamation that maintains that human beings are equal before God. 119. He is scandalized by the social advancement of non-Muslims who had previously been assigned an inferior position under Islamic law: another consequence of the French occupation of Egypt, Jabarti laments, was "the elevation of the humblest Copts, Syrians, Greeks, and Jews. They rode horses and adorned themselves with swords because of their service to the French; They strutted about haughtily, openly expressed obscenities and mocked Muslims 120”. Jabarti was right to be concerned about the liberal and egalitarian proclamations of the French Revolution, which threatened an Islamic civilization foreign to these principles. The Other Decolonization Initially indifferent to the French Revolution, the Ottoman Empire then rejoiced in the discord it sowed in Europe, before becoming concerned about the effects of its proclamations on its subjects 121, as can be read in an Ottoman communication: The French nation […] affirms that the books brought by the Prophets are in error, that the Quran, the Torah and the Gospels are nothing but lies and nonsense and that those who

proclaim themselves Prophets… lie to the ignorant people…, that all men are equal and alike, that none is superior in merit to any other and that each one disposes of his soul and organizes his own life here below 122. This terrible message risked giving ideas to the peoples subjected to Turkish domination, such as the Serbs and the Greeks, who were the first to show themselves sensitive to it. The Greek poet Constantin Rhigas had the Declaration of the Rights of Man translated and composed a Greek version of La Marseillaise before being handed over by the Austrians and executed by the Turks. Traveling through occupied Greece, the writer Chateaubriand, the Reverend Thomas Smart Hughes, and the archaeologist Edward Dodwell each noted the "gratuitous brutality," the "hail of blows," the "gunshots" that Turkish settlers randomly inflicted on ordinary Greek bystanders, who were left seriously wounded, "until blood streamed down their faces," unable to protest for fear of worsening their condition.123 With Russian, French, and British aid, as well as that of Philhellenic volunteers, Greece freed itself from the Sublime Porte, which was forced to sign the Treaty of Adrianople: thus began the dissolution of an empire so averse to equality that, throughout its agony, it would have to rely on external pressure to improve the status of non-Muslims.124 Witnessing Ottoman subordination to Europe, the Ottoman writer and administrator Ziyad Pasha railed against the fact that 20 million Muslims "endure so much degradation and humiliation to guarantee the tranquility of 11 million Christians of all denominations who are inferior to them demographically but also in every respect."125 European protection failed to immunize Christians against the sporadic violence they suffered. The Damascus massacres of 1860, during which many Christians were killed by Druze jealous of their social advancement, illustrate this hatred. These atrocities culminated in the Armenian, Assyrian-Chaldean, and Pontic Greek genocides, which Turkey still discreetly covers up today.126 Like many minorities in the lands of Islam, the Jews saw their fate embellished, as it was historically less harsh than in Christian lands, which was hardly an achievement.127 “It wasn’t in Arab countries that Jews were put on trains,” a French member of parliament asserted to deny anti-

Semitism in Muslim communities.128 So, simply not imitating the Third Reich is enough to earn a medal for tolerance! This remark seems even more irreverent when one considers that the descendants of refugees from the Arab world make up nearly half of Israel's population,129 a country that owes its existence less to Muslim benevolence than to its technological superiority, the only bulwark against another genocide. Indeed, Muslims have never been inclined to view Jews as their equals. Zionism would have been less popular had Arab societies produced reformers like Clermont-Tonnerre, who enabled France to become the first European country to emancipate Jews during the Revolution. In 1834, the execution of a Moroccan Jewish woman accused of renouncing Islam inspired a famous painting by Alfred Dehodencq. Visiting the Sharifian kingdom before the protectorate, the writer Pierre Loti—hardly suspected of Islamophobia or philosemitism—described the Jewish quarter of Fez in these terms: "One feels that one lives in this den in perpetual fear of one's neighbors, Arabs or Berbers." And, before their city gates, lies the general dump for dead animals (a courtesy bestowed upon them): to reach their homes, one must pass between piles of dead horses, dead dogs, and all sorts of carcasses, rotting in the sun, giving off an indescribable stench; they are not allowed to remove them—and there is a great chorus of jackals in the evening beneath their walls. In their narrow streets, so narrow as to be impassable, they are also forbidden from removing the refuse discarded from the houses; for months bones, vegetable peelings, and garbage pile up, until an Arab official decides to have them cleared away for a large sum of money.130 The status of the Oriental Jews would have to wait for European pressure to be improved. It was in French Algeria that Jews from the Arab world experienced equality for the first time under the pressure of the colonizer, which explains why the "native Israelites" welcomed the French presence. Arab Islamist and nationalist literature would never forgive them for this "betrayal," without subjecting the treatment of minorities in the land of Islam to the slightest critical examination.131 A similar Francophilia animated Jewish circles in Tunisia, who petitioned colonial authorities for French citizenship,

authorities who hesitated to offend the pride of Muslims by granting social advancement to their former subjects.132 Commenting on the royal decree of February 5, 1864, which prohibited discrimination against Moroccan Jews, the historian Al-Naciri judged that "this freedom established by Europeans in recent years is the absolute work of irreligion, for it entails the complete destruction of the rights of God, the rights of parents, and the rights of humanity."133 The Forgotten Struggle Against Muslim Slavery. It was in the name of these same “rights of God and humanity” that Muslim societies maintained slavery as long as they could, to the point that they were never able to abolish this infamous institution on their own initiative. Whereas the struggle against slavery in the West was the result of an internal process, its decline in the lands of Islam is largely attributable to Western imperial pressures. This reality, combined with political correctness, explains the limited attention paid to what is nevertheless one of the greatest revolutions in the history of humankind. In an article dedicated to the French struggle against indigenous slavery in Algeria, the historian Marcel Emerit noted that “this victory of the idea of humanity on African soil has not been recounted by historians of slavery.” While it is inconceivable to study Western history without mentioning slavery and the struggles for its abolition, syntheses on the history of Muslim societies stubbornly avoid this subject, leaving it to specialists.136 Western school curricula are no more forthcoming, while Muslim societies elevate ignorance on this issue to the status of the norm. In 2018, the Qatari channel Al Jazeera censored a segment of a documentary on Muslim participation in slavery.137 It is difficult to identify any public monument dedicated to commemorating the struggle against slavery in Islamic lands. Muslims even actively seek out the few European monuments that mention it, as demonstrated by the pressure exerted by the Arab League to remove from a Brussels building the reference to the Arab-Swahili slave traders fought by Francis Dhanis.138 Why this denialism? Is it because there are no local heroes to celebrate in this matter? Is it because Muslims cannot bear to concede any merit to the West, at the risk of abandoning the fiction of their innocence? Is the

inability of Muslim societies to combat slavery outside the injunctions of the unbeliever a dishonor they dare not confront, for fear of drawing the necessary conclusions about the virtues of their religion? Or is it because criticism of slavery is blasphemous in the eyes of Muslim tradition, which celebrates Muhammad as one of its most enthusiastic followers, leading the Soviet Islamic scholar Evgenii Belyaev to link the rise of Islam in the 7th century to "the formation of a slave system within a declining primitive communal society"? For the Islamic scholar Bernard Lewis, abolishing slavery from a traditional Muslim perspective would have been virtually impossible. "To forbid what God permits is an offense almost as great as permitting what God forbids." While Islam was born several centuries after the first global indictment against slavery by Gregory of Nyssa, there was, before the arrival of Europeans, never an equivalent of this Valladolid controversy (1550-1551) which saw theologians rise up against the enslavement of Indians, Blacks and pagans. According to the Spanish Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas: “It is neither possible nor permissible for a Christian people to wage war against any infidel, whether Moor, Arab, Turk, Tartar, or Indian, or of any other kind, faith, or religion, without committing grave mortal sins.”141 The Muslim world has never produced a civil society dedicated to the fight against slavery similar to the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the Society of the Friends of Blacks, or the Society for Christian Morality. There has never been a Muslim Lincoln, Victor Schoelcher, Charles Grey, Lavigerie, or Livingstone. Although Barbary pirate attacks against Christendom declined during the 18th century due to a more favorable balance of power for the West, their persistence prompted the British politician Sidney Smith to address the Congress of Vienna regarding their atrocities against Europeans and Africans: “While the means of abolishing the slave trade on the west coast of Africa are being discussed […], it is astonishing that no attention is being paid to the northern coast of that same country, inhabited by Turkish pirates, who not only oppress the natives of their neighborhood but also abduct and buy them as slaves, to employ them in armed ships engaged in raiding to drag honest farmers and peaceful inhabitants of the

European coasts from their homes.” The Congress of Vienna, which the Ottomans refused to attend, wished to abolish the slave trade, which had “long devastated Africa, degraded Europe, and afflicted humanity 144”. Commanding a Dutch-British fleet, Lord Exmouth secured the liberation of over a thousand Christians in 1816 through the bombardment of Algiers, dealing a near-decisive blow to the enslavement of Europeans by the Barbary pirates, although their attacks persisted and prompted the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1819 to threaten them with reprisals that could “affect them to their very existence 145”. While there were no longer any European slaves in Algeria at the time of the French invasion, the presence of several thousand Black slaves remained, some of whom attempted to flee their native masters to obtain the protection of the new colonizer, sometimes in vain. In 1839, when Abdelkader learned that his wife had been unfaithful to him with the complicity of two of his servants, a Black man and a Black woman, they took refuge in Algiers. Marshal Valée ordered them to be handed over to the emir. Despite the poor people's cries, tears, and pleas to be slaughtered immediately instead of delaying their inevitable torment, they were handed over and perished shortly afterward under atrocious torture.146 In 1840, the deputy prosecutor of Oran provoked protests from the Algerian notable Mustapha ben Ismaïl on the grounds that he had freed slaves belonging to his tribe: "This affair attacks our religion and destroys our power […] Our law has made us masters of our Negroes since the time of our Lord Noah […]." Each of us has Negroes, whom we paid for with our own money. 147 Pressed by its most enlightened citizens to abolish slavery in Algeria as soon as possible, France nevertheless waited until 1848 to implement this revolution, for fear of alienating its new subjects: "I do not think that we have dominated the Arabs for long enough for us to be able to safely adopt a measure that would seriously offend the interests of this people," Bugeaud retorted to the philanthropists in 1844. 148 The reading of the abolitionist decree in the mosques was followed by maneuvers by natives to perpetuate their trafficking under the cover of the administration, by transferring their slaves to the tribal and rural areas where France had little presence. The difficulty for

the colonial administration in eradicating this institution is illustrated by the existence of Muslim slave owners in the Algiers region at the beginning of the 20th century and in some remote regions of the Algerian Sahara after independence 149. Enjoined in 1842 by the British to fight against the trade in human beings, the Sultan of Morocco objected that the legitimacy of slavery "requires no more demonstration than daylight 150", before using the backwardness of his subjects as a pretext for not following up on abolitionist requests: This empire is not like other countries, which are civilized and whose inhabitants live in cities; here for the most part, they are Bedouins and Nomads, who do not always stay in the same place but move with the wind. Nothing can restrain them, and it is very difficult for them to renounce their customs—especially when it concerns religion.151 The public slave markets in Morocco were closed by the French in 1912. However, a clandestine trade persisted for a long time afterward.152 At the first World Convention against Slavery in London in June 1840, the Briton John Bowring insisted on the need to persuade Eastern rulers “that they had a profound interest in abolishing slavery and that their own prosperity was closely linked to the freedom of Black people.”153 All indications, however, that this wish remained just that—a wish. In Egypt, the slave trade only truly declined with the British occupation from the 1880s onward. 154 “Who is noble, who is a slave, who is a lord – this can no longer be known, since the infidel has leveled all social differences,” laments an Acehnese poem, which uses Dutch abolitionist measures as a pretext to encourage the Sultanate of Aceh, in present-day Indonesia, to wage holy war. 155 Invited in 1861 by the Spanish occupiers to free his slaves, the Sultan of Maguindanao replied that he would rather abandon his wife and children than his captives, since he would cease to be sultan without them. 156 In Mauritania, theologians used the French liberation of slaves as a pretext to call for emigration and holy war. 157 And a prominent Somali official complained to an Italian administrator in 1926: "All our slaves have escaped and fled to you, and you have ordered their release. We are displeased with this. It is not in accordance with our law, for according to our law, we can imprison slaves and force them to

work." We are true Muslims, following the Prophet Muhammad and all the saints. 158. “The colonizer’s job is to make even the colonized’s dreams of freedom impossible,” we read in the writings of Frantz Fanon, who somewhat hastily overlooks the fact that indigenous resistance to imperialism was also, in many cases, resistance to the abolition of slavery. 159. In Zanzibar, the Sultan of Oman, Sayyid Sa'id, objected in 1826 to British exhortations to fight against slavery, arguing that this policy risked making him the enemy of all Muslims and forcing him into exile. 160. It was the strengthening of European control in the Indian Ocean that led to the decline of the slave trade in the region. 161. In the Comoros archipelago, the French abolished slavery island by island: 1847, 1891, 1902, and 1904 for Mayotte, Anjouan, Mohéli, and Grande Comore. 162. In response to British pressure, the King of Persia, Muhammad Shah, emphasized the impossibility of abolishing slavery in Islamic lands, highlighting the difference between Christianity and the religion of Muhammad: “If, according to their religion, this trade is considered an abominable practice, in our religion, it is permissible. Why should the things that our Prophet made permissible for us be considered detestable?” And the Shah reiterated that “the purchase of women and men is based on the Sharia of the last Prophet. I cannot forbid my people something that is permissible according to Sharia.” 163. Unable to impose the end of slavery in Persia, the British chose to cut off the supply of slaves through measures targeting their importation, in order to render servitude obsolete. The abolition of slavery was not decreed there until 1929 by Reza Shah Pahlavi. The British employed the same strategy with the Ottomans and obtained the suppression of the slave trade in the Gulf region in 1847, the prohibition and discouragement of the trade in white slaves from the Georgian and Circassian coasts in 1854, the prohibition of the slave trade of Black people to Crete and Ioannina in 1855, and the general prohibition of the slave trade in 1857, among other measures, although the Ottomans never abolished slavery as such.164 “No effective abolitionist movement ever emerged in the Ottoman Empire,” recalls historian Ehud Toledano, who argues that Ottoman policy toward this institution “can be characterized as

a continuous resistance—both passive and active, and to varying degrees of intensity—to British abolitionist pressures." Slavery "was taken for granted, and abolitionism […] was a foreign idea; it came from England, was scarcely understood, and made few or no converts."165 The Ottoman historian Ahmed Cevdet Pasha directly linked the weakening of the Turks with that of the slave trade: "The state lost its former vigor. The former glory and dignity of its high officials also disappeared […]. For this reason, foreign interference began to manifest itself openly. The Ottoman Empire was reduced to a pitiful state. The prohibition of black slaves definitively confirmed this situation."166 Ordered by the British, the Ottoman abolitionist policy did not go without provoking revolts: "The ban on slaves is contrary to the holy Sharia […]. With such proposals, the Turks have become infidels." "Their blood is lost, and it is lawful to enslave their children," proclaimed Sheikh Jamal in 1857 from the sacred province of Hejaz, which was both a place of pilgrimage and a vast slave depot.167 It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the Gulf States, under foreign pressure, took active measures against this institution. While a few Muslim voices attempted to legitimize Western abolitionist policies, their influence is questionable.168 In this sea of inhumanity, the Tunisian exception is sometimes celebrated: the Regency of Tunis is said to have been the first Muslim regime to abolish slavery on its own initiative in 1846.169 The reality is quite different. Invited by the British consul Thomas Reade to tackle this institution, Ahmed Bey never invalidated the principle of slavery. At most, he argued that the criteria for the legality of human enslavement were no longer met or risked being violated due to the mistreatment inflicted on captives, while lamenting that the presence of slaves served as a pretext for European interference in his country. Finally, the Tunisian regime was never able to eradicate the slave trade and slavery, which survived at least until the French protectorate. Despite the efforts devoted to the elimination of servitude over the last two centuries, slavery persists in many countries. In September 2022, the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery report, published by the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and the NGO Walk

Free, estimated the number of people affected by modern slavery at 50 million. It states that the Arab Gulf states form the region where the prevalence of slavery is highest, while Muslim countries are overrepresented among the nations most affected by this scourge. Another exploit of the wretched of the earth.

4 Progressives and noble savages.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Jesus Christ. “Each century will add new lights to those of the century that preceded it; and these advances, which nothing can henceforth stop or suspend, will have no other limits than those of the duration of the universe.” It is with these optimistic words that Condorcet closes the doors of the 18th century and opens those of the 19th. An idealistic century, driven by the conviction that humanity was “on the path that led directly and infallibly to the best of all possible worlds.” The French Revolution overthrows the privileges of the old order. The shockwave it produced swept across Europe and shook the gates of the East, which was scandalized by the "false teachings" professed by the heretics who had deprived the French of "the fear of God and of punishment." In 1798, the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs warned his government against this atheist France where "equality and liberty were sought at all costs, through which they hoped to attain perfect happiness in this world." Liberalism embraced the principle of nationalities. Industry took off. Commerce and cities expanded their reach. Hygiene improved along with life expectancy. Parliaments became more active. Education gradually ceased to be the exclusive domain of the elite, while insurance slowly but surely broadened the circle of its beneficiaries. Sixty years before the October Revolution, Friedrich Engels, who had distinguished

himself in 1845 with his work on the plight of the English working class, noted to Marx, in a tone of surprise and slight exasperation, that "the English proletariat is really becoming more and more bourgeois, so much so that this nation, the most bourgeois of all, seems to be heading towards having a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie." This scenario, terrible in that it renders the grand revolution obsolete, endows the Old Continent with a power that allows it to extend its influence into worlds previously inaccessible. “Europe is the smallest of the four parts of the world, but […] it has attained such a high degree of power that history has almost nothing to compare it to in this respect,” observed Jaucourt in the 18th century. From the best of all possible worlds to great cataclysms, the Western way of life seduced a segment of the Eastern elites. “Soon the veil, already growing ever thinner, will disappear from women’s faces, and Islam with it will vanish completely. The number of pilgrims to Mecca is decreasing daily. The ulema are getting drunk like the Swiss. They’re talking about Voltaire!” Flaubert laments emphatically, scrutinizing Constantinople and its increasingly less exotic customs, while French is establishing itself as the means of accessing modernity among the upper classes of the Ottoman Empire, much to the chagrin of the conservatives. Europe is at its zenith. No force can dethrone it. In 1910, the British writer Norman Angell published his bestseller, The Grand Illusion, in which he proclaimed the end of the war. "Any radical transformation, any violence seemed almost impossible in that age of reason," Stefan Zweig recounts nostalgically. This was to reckon without human nature, endowed "with this infinite capacity to produce children and men who detest the social and political system into which they are born, who hate the air they breathe, even though they live by it and have known no other." The 20th century shattered the optimism of Zweig and his contemporaries with its abominations, its nationalisms, its regressions, its total wars, its dictatorships, its genocides, while the crimes and iniquities of the colonial system were laid bare for all to see. The renowned physician Cesare Lombroso protested in 1901: “We have seen the bestiality of war unleashed from one end of the world to the other, in Africa, the

Philippines, and China, and this through the fault of peoples whom we initially believed to be the most civilized, the most fervent worshippers of peace.”11 The continent that arrogates to itself the duty of civilizing the “inferior races” observes that barbarity has never left it. Then came Césaire’s pronouncement: “Europe is spiritually and morally indefensible.”12 Despite his absurdities that held up the Soviet Union as a model, Césaire was right. A continent that had been the cradle of so many utopias had no excuse whatsoever for wallowing in such abjection and destroying the promise of a better world that so many idealists had envisioned. The crisis of the 1930s is a convenient scapegoat for the inexcusable. It was a rural France, ravaged by famine, that emancipated the Jews and enshrined individual liberty as an inviolable principle. It was a more educated and industrialized Europe that gave birth to Drumont and Mein Kampf. The decivilization of Europe began before being revealed by the financial crises. The monopoly on repentance: The 20th century is a stain on the great Western epic. From there to attributing all the world's ills to itself is but a short step, one that Europe takes with a strange glee. The native is absolved of his sins, like Christopher Columbus, who contributes to the myth of the noble savage by praising these Indians as free from all faults: "They are very gentle and ignorant of what evil is." Montaigne follows suit and rails against those who use their backwardness as a pretext to enslave them: "We can therefore rightly call them barbarians, with regard to the rules of reason, but not with regard to ourselves, who surpass them in all kinds of barbarity." The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, for his part, lamented these societies "struck down by that monstrous and incomprehensible cataclysm which was, for such a large and innocent fraction of humanity, the development of Western civilization." But what does this generous grant of innocence to foreign civilizations mean when History is “the record of humanity’s crimes, follies, and misfortunes”? Some will see in it the self-hatred characteristic of the West. In his pioneering works, the writer Pascal Bruckner brilliantly discussed this poorly digested Christianity, which he posits as the origin of this self-flagellation. But it could be, in fact, that the monopoly on repentance cultivated

by Europeans stems from the opposite sentiment: lacking humility, Europeans believe they bear the weight of a world incapable of taking responsibility for itself. “The peoples discovered by navigators are like children of different ages surrounding an adult,” the poet Schiller asserted. And aren’t children, like the insane, exempt from the duty of being held accountable before the courts? At the very moment when Rome was reeling under the blows of the barbarian invasions, the Christian ascetic Salvian of Marseille excused these innocent vandals, for they were ignorant of morality, unlike the Romans who sinned knowingly: "If you except the small number of Romans I have just mentioned, I maintain that all, or almost all, lead a more guilty and criminal life than the barbarians. Let us compare the lives of the barbarians to our inclinations, our morals, and our vices. The barbarians are unjust, and so are we; they are avaricious, and so are we; treacherous, and so are we; in short, the barbarians are characterized by all sorts of perversions and impurities, and so are we. All the barbarians, as I have already said, are either pagans or heretics; I will speak first of the pagans, for their error is the most ancient." The Saxons are cruel, the Franks treacherous, the Gepids inhuman, the Huns shameless; in short, the life of all these barbarian peoples is corruption itself. But are their vices as culpable as ours? Is the shamelessness of the Huns as criminal as ours? Is the bad faith of the Franks as blameworthy as ours? […] If a Frank commits perjury, what is so strange about him, since he considers perjury a manner of speaking and not a sin? And what is surprising about the Barbarians thinking this way, since they are ignorant of the law and God, while the majority of Romans think the same, even though they know full well that they are sinning? […] What is surprising, then, about the Barbarians being deceitful, since they do not know that deception is a crime? They do nothing out of contempt for heavenly precepts, since they do not know the commandments of the Lord. He who is ignorant of the Law does not act against it. 19. Contrary to the adage that no one is presumed to be ignorant of the law, the barbarian benefits from mitigating circumstances by virtue of his ignorance of moral norms. The Romans are unforgivable, they who violate moral precepts that they are

supposed to know. Therefore, exclusive penance reflects a feeling of superiority and disdain for nations deemed incapable of rising to the level of civilization. Positioning himself as the sole actor in History, an isolated adult within a world deemed immature, the European arrogates to himself the privilege of appearing before its tribunal. The Westerner, who only judges himself, is convinced that he alone has reached the age of reason and is worthy of being judged, while it would be futile to expect anything from other nations mired in their own minority status. Racism, imperialism, slavery, genocide, dictatorships, inquisitions, misogyny: in the eyes of his critics, the atrocities that mark the history of the West are all the more unbearable because Europeans had no excuse, given the level of enlightenment they had attained. The Stoics' proclamation of the unity of humankind before the Christian era, Plato's conviction that women and men are called to the same teachings and functions, Tertullian's certainty that neither gods nor men appreciate forced homage, Dante's condemnation of war, and the grand, perpetual peace projects that permeate Western political thought—all these literary and philosophical achievements should have protected Europe from its excesses. Rightly so, the repentant European cannot forgive himself for having failed to observe principles within his grasp, given a history rich in political and literary achievements. However, he is more lenient toward the failings of Arabs, Africans, and other peoples, believing that demanding the same standards from them would be unreasonable. In this sense, Islam is suitable for these peoples with a “rudimentary mentality,” to use the words of a French colonial official who urged his fellow citizens not to try to convert Africans to a Christian religion too subtle for these savages.21 It is not out of the question that the Islamophilia of some of our elites today differs from its older forms in that it remains secretly […] nourished by this kind of condescending sentiment, certainly transposed into another register, but imbued with profound contempt.22 Scoring an own goal, Said also pleaded for leniency towards Muslim societies, “accused of backwardness, lack of democracy, and indifference to women’s rights. To the point of making us forget that notions such as modernity, the

Enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and unambiguous concepts that everyone would eventually discover, like Easter eggs hidden in their garden."23 According to those who claim to fight against the stereotypes surrounding the Orient, some peoples are incapable of attaining Enlightenment ideals. It is on the basis of these prejudices that a former French Minister of Justice deemed it unnecessary to include Arab-Muslim slavery in the collective memory of a France nevertheless called upon to embrace its pluralistic identity: "We mustn't talk too much about the Arab-Muslim slave trade so that young Arabs don't bear the full weight of the Arabs' misdeeds on their shoulders," asserted Christiane Taubira in a display of unparalleled contempt.24 The native is presumed incapable of approaching the history of their ancestors with a critical eye. And, while animals could be brought before a judge in the Middle Ages, the Oriental is deprived of the dignity of accountability by virtue of the excuse of minority. However, considering that Christianity preceded Islam by several centuries in the world, I cannot help but hope that Muslim society will one day break free from its ties and resolutely march along the path of civilization, like Western society, for which the Christian faith, despite its rigors and intolerance, was not an insurmountable obstacle. This is what the pan-Islamist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani objected to Ernest Renan in response to his indictment of a Muslim civilization incompatible, according to him, with the philosophical spirit. Here, the more refined character of Europe is attributed to the antiquity of Christianity, whereas the later arrival of Islam is said to explain the backwardness of societies under its rule. This exhortation to patience has, over time, become a truly dangerous cliché that leads to tolerating the intolerable. In his film *The Young Imam*, director Kim Chapiron, advised by Islamic scholar Rachid Benzine, has his character say, in a slightly annoyed tone, that "where Christianity took four centuries to accept criticism, Islam is being asked to make this theological upheaval in just a few decades!" Are we to conclude that it is up to the enlightened to adapt to the devout and allow themselves to be slaughtered for a few more centuries, until the fanatics deign to reform? On what grounds? The excuse of minority status applied to Muslims is not

only insulting to the native population who have quickly acculturated to modernity. It also overlooks the fact that less advanced cultures do not evolve in isolation. They can, immediately, if they so choose, benefit from the history of the most liberal societies, so there is no need to go through their trials and tribulations to align themselves with their standards. The excuse of minority status also ignores the fact that Muslims did not live on an isolated island before being connected to the rest of humanity, like the Native Americans who discovered caravels overnight. It is not true, as this character created by Houellebecq claims, that Islam "could only have been born in a stupid desert, amidst filthy Bedouins." Things are far worse. A deliberate sabotage. Islam, let us emphasize, was born within one of the oldest crossroads of civilizations. It was born with a silver spoon in its mouth. It developed within the Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian worlds, as evidenced by the biblical and New Testament references in the Quran: Certain passages of the Quran were composed by writers with a deep knowledge of Christianity and specific Christian texts. Thus, behind the writing of entire passages of the Quran, there are people with skills and knowledge similar to those of Christian scholars.27 From these worlds, Islam stole the most opulent and cultured provinces. Muslims remained a minority in this refined world for a long time. They had at their fingertips everything, absolutely everything, the intangible heritage that gave birth to the most liberal societies. Moreover, the later arrival of Islam in relation to ancient doctrines and religions is an aggravating circumstance and in no way a mitigating one: new ideas always have an advantage over previous ones. "It is fitting that we treat our successors as our predecessors treated us; "With this difference, that we have discovered more teachings than they did, just as our successors will discover more than we do," wrote Al-Jahiz, meaning that humanity's institutions and knowledge are expected to improve as time passes.28 Who said that the linear view of progress was exclusively Western? Being an adherent of fixism in the Middle Ages is one thing. Remaining so several centuries after Darwin is unforgivable, given the advantages that the addition of new knowledge confers. Anyone who develops a new theory in the

21st century in any discipline benefits from the truths, errors, and accumulated labor of their predecessors. They are expected to refine the teachings of the past without denying the progress made by previous generations. On what grounds have religions been exempted from this basic requirement? The sordid passages found in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, can still be understood. This work contains many myths and stories that were forged several centuries before our era, within the context of the ancient civilizations of the Near East.29 Just as it would be harsh to criticize Hammurabi for not implementing human rights, it would be anachronistic to criticize the Legend of Solomon for not being written in inclusive language. Yet, between the writing of the Legend of Solomon and the composition of the biography of Muhammad and the Quran, more than a thousand years passed. An interval during which the world witnessed the emergence of figures such as Homer, Aesop, Lao Tzu, Buddha, Pythagoras, Confucius, Cleisthenes, Sophocles, Socrates, Aristophanes, Plato, Democritus, Aristotle, Epicurus, Alexander the Great, Ashoka, Euclid, Archimedes, Valmiki, Hillel the Elder, Philo of Alexandria, Pliny the Elder, the authors of the Gospels, Gregory of Nyssa, and so many other giants whom it is impossible to honor in a single lifetime. Yet the founders of Islam were not entirely ignorant of the most refined traditions that preceded them. The reason for writing Muhammad's biography was, moreover, "the need felt by Muslim scholars to produce a historical text in the face of competition from the Gospels, and to affirm, in the face of Christian doctrine, the figure of a Prophet foretold by earlier Scriptures, equal to Jesus without being of divine nature," we read in the writings of historian Françoise Micheau, who reminds us that Muhammad's biographers reworked these accounts "by removing the features that could damage the image of the Prophet."30 Apparently, this vast whitewashing operation did not include the suppression of torture, slaughter, wars, pillaging, and the enslavement of women and children.31 Far from being anachronistic, the denunciation of the most infamous aspects of Islamic prophecy was, in fact, the work of its earliest witnesses: "Do the prophets come armed from head to toe?" “We read in the Doctrina Jacobi, composed in the

7th century. 32 Herein lies the most troubling aspect of Islam: written two hundred years after the events it purports to recount, lacking any historical basis, making it impossible to reconstruct the life of Muhammad, its oldest surviving hagiography could have depicted a completely different figure than the one Muslims have created. Muhammad does not transmit technology to humankind at the cost of his physical integrity, as Prometheus does. He does not protect literature and science, like the Assyro-Babylonian god Nabu. He does not teach his disciples to build temples and cultivate farmland, like the Mesopotamian god Oannes." To the Gospel accounts in which Jesus saves a woman from stoning, Muslims solemnly oppose a prophet who beheads, plunders caravans, and authorizes an unlimited number of sex slaves. Although drawing on Jewish customs, the authors of the Quran and the compilers of Muhammad's words and deeds did not improve the Ten Commandments. Instead, they recycled the most mediocre and archaic norms of ancient Judaism, such as aniconism, stoning for adultery, and arbitrary dietary restrictions.33 Although drawing on Christian narratives, they neither adopted nor improved upon the Sermon on the Mount. Although inheriting Byzantine institutions, they permitted the marriage and rape of prepubescent girls, whereas Roman law punished the seduction of a girl under thirteen with amputation.34 If the biography of Islam begins, in Braudel's words, with the interminable history of the Near East, it is an understatement to say that this history went astray and that this religion missed its entry onto the world stage. To think that the grand history of the Orient would culminate in the revelation of a slave-trading Bedouin is, to say the least, absurd. Nothing is more offensive to the dignity of the Orient and of humanity than the condescending commentaries that see in the so-called Quranic revelation, as invented by Muslims, a text "admirably adapted to the needs and conditions of the moment."35 Discussing "the three great religious attempts that humankind has made to free itself from the persecution of the dead, the malevolence of the afterlife, and the anxieties of magic"—which, according to him, are Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—Lévi-Strauss judged "that it is striking that each stage, far from marking

progress over the previous one, rather testifies to a regression…; rational evolution is the inverse of that of history: Islam has cut a more civilized world in two.” The fact that the Quran was finalized around the 10th century and that Islamic law took shape around the 8th and 9th centuries, long after the beginning of the Christian era, means that Muslims could and should have refined the legacy of Late Antiquity to develop values more sophisticated than those of earlier systems. However, the opposite occurred. Islam did not merely decivilize the East and the rest of humanity along with it. It attempted to disguise its crime by denigrating the ancient East, so that darkness would cloak itself in the garb of light. "Pre-Islamic Arabia, as conceived by Islamic scholars, is anarchic, illiterate, and almost entirely polytheistic. We now know that this image is quite far removed from what archaeology reveals," notes historian Christian Robin, for whom this contrast is explained by the fact that Muslim scholars did not intend to produce historical accounts, but rather to illuminate the meaning of the Quranic text, to answer religious questions, and to highlight all the positive aspects that adherence to Islam had brought to believers. The approach of these scholars was primarily apologetic.38 This is how we must interpret the legends, disseminated by early Muslim authors and lacking credibility, that pre-Islamic Arabia buried baby girls alive, depriving them of any possibility of inheritance and holding prestigious social positions, before Muhammad rescued them from these practices.39 In reality, there are examples in pre-Islamic Arabia of women who owned land and were publicly and officially recognized as such in legal documents. They were granted the right to appear in court in their own name, as well as the right to inherit. Women could have legal documents drawn up without needing a guardian. There are also examples of women acting as judges in resolving disputes. Queens, goddesses, and female prophets, as well as women of the upper class, enjoyed high status and legal rights and privileges. Queens were depicted on coins, draped in long garments belted at the waist. From Queen Zabibi to Mavia, passing through the ancient kingdom of Lihyan, historians have documented many situations where women in pre-Islamic Arabia held prestigious positions. In South Arabia, women

are economic actors “who conduct real estate or financial transactions, either on their own behalf or in partnership with men. Numerous short texts confirm the strong presence of women in economic life.”42 For the Egyptian historian Leila Ahmed, Islamic civilization developed a conception of history that characterizes the pre-Islamic period as an age of ignorance and projects Islam as the sole source of civilization—and used this conception so effectively in its rewriting of history that the peoples of the Near East lost all knowledge of the region’s past civilizations. Clearly, this construct was ideologically useful, successfully concealing, among other things, the fact that, in some Near Eastern cultures, women were far better off before the advent of Islam than after.43 However, clumsy as they are, the propagandists of Islam are unable to erase all traces of their misdeeds. And it is not uncommon for Muslim sources to betray themselves and contradict the backward image of ancient Arabia that they are trying to propagate. It is amusing to observe that Muslim mythology depicts Khadija, Muhammad's first wife, as a prosperous businesswoman in this barbaric and idolatrous Arabia, and this before the supposed prophet began his disastrous preaching. Césaire's sentence can be amended: Islam is indefensible.

5 Archaisms and Despotisms

Now, the Europeans have come to know the whole world; they send their ships everywhere and seize important ports [...]. The Ottoman Empire must seize the shores of Yemen and the trade that passes through there; otherwise, before long, the Europeans will rule the lands of Islam. Omar Talib, 17th-century Ottoman subject. "Why have the Muslims fallen behind and why have others gotten ahead?" “asked the Lebanese Druze Chakib Arslan in the title of a pamphlet published in the 1930s.1 The observation that the Orient is mired in backwardness is not a colonial cliché, or not only that, as the Islamic world has not failed to deplore it. From the end of the 19th century, a mass of essays were published there by reformers all developing a similar idea: “Why have other nations advanced, and we regressed?”2 "An ideal culprit. True to the scapegoat strategy, Frantz Fanon wrote that the appearance of the colonizer meant 'death of the native society, cultural lethargy, petrification of individuals,' at the risk of discouraging self-examination in cultures that need it.3 The cliché that attributes the success of the West to imperialism and slavery does not explain why African and Muslim societies, which forged vast empires and tolerated servitude for a longer period and, sometimes, in greater proportions, remained archaic.4 Did not Adam Smith already write in the 18th century that slave labor was less efficient than free labor, in addition to being immoral?5" And yet, the idea that foreigners are responsible for the misery of the Orient resonates with a large part of the population, notes the

Turkish-born American economist Timur Kuran.6 This fiction fails to account for the abyss that separated the East from the West before the latter seized the former: "Colonialism and imperialism, unjustifiable like any domination imposed by force, appear to be more the consequence of the differences between nations than their cause," to the point that even the detractors of bourgeois societies were not unaware of these disparities, before doing an about-face.7 The year of the publication of the Communist Manifesto, Friedrich Engels designated the conquest of Algeria as a positive event for the march of progress: The conquest of Algeria has already forced the beys of Tunis and Tripoli, and even the emperor of Morocco, to embark on the path of civilization. They were forced to find other occupations for their people than piracy […]. And while we may regret that the freedom of the desert Bedouins was destroyed, we must not forget that these same Bedouins were a nation of robbers, whose principal means of subsistence consisted of raiding either one another or settled villagers, taking what they found, massacring all who resisted, and selling the remaining prisoners into slavery. All these nations of free barbarians appear very proud, noble, and glorious from afar, but approach them and you will discover that they, just like the more civilized nations, are governed by the thirst for gain and employ only the roughest and most cruel means. And after all, the modern bourgeois, with the civilization, industry, order and at least the relative enlightenment with which he is surrounded, is preferable to the feudal lord or the marauding robber, with the barbaric state of society to which they belong. 8 His friend Karl Marx is just as severe on the state of India when the British take over the region: We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, despite their harmless appearance, have always been a solid foundation of oriental despotism, that they confined human reason within an extremely narrow framework, making it a docile instrument of superstition and the slave of accepted rules […] ; We must not forget that this vegetative, stagnant, undignified life, this kind of passive existence, on the other hand, unleashed blind and savage forces of destruction, and made murder itself a religious rite in Hindustan [...], that these small communities bore

the infamous mark of castes and slavery, that they subjected man to external circumstances, instead of making him sovereign, that they made a social state an all-powerful fatality, the origin of a crude cult of nature, whose degrading character was reflected in the fact that man, master of nature, fell to his knees and worshipped Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow [...]. In this case, however sad we may feel at the sight of the collapse of an ancient world, we have the right to exclaim with Goethe: “Should this sorrow torment us, since it increases our joy? Has not the yoke of Timur crushed myriads of human lives?” A historical divide. Whatever one thinks of Marx’s flights of fancy, it would be strange to accuse Bonaparte of being responsible for the fact that the Egyptians were unfamiliar with printing before his incursion and waited twenty years after his departure to adopt it. A staunch opponent of the occupation of his country, the Egyptian writer Al-Jabarti was nonetheless obliged to acknowledge the divide between his country and the French: “The glorious Qur’an is translated into their language! As are many other Islamic books […]. I have seen some of them who know chapters of the Qur’an by heart.” They show a great interest in the sciences, especially mathematics and the study of languages, and make great efforts to learn Arabic and its dialect. They devote their days and nights to it. They possess books specifically dedicated to all types of languages, their declensions and conjugations, as well as their etymologies. They have extraordinary astronomical instruments of perfect construction and instruments for measuring altitudes, of marvelous, astonishing, and precious construction. They also have telescopes for observing the stars and measuring their extents, sizes, altitudes, conjunctions, and oppositions, as well as water clocks and clocks with minute and second markings, all of marvelous and very precious design, and many other things besides.11 And the Egyptian, after witnessing unprecedented scientific experiments, remarked that "all these people know a great many things and extraordinary combinations; they achieve unimaginable results."12 How can we explain that the French could not say the same of the successors of the Pharaohs? A partial answer is offered by a conversation recounted by the printer

Antoine Galland between Napoleon and local dignitaries: The commander-in-chief told the sheikhs that the Arabs had cultivated the sciences during the time of the caliphs, but that they were now in profound ignorance, and that nothing remained of the knowledge of their ancestors. Sheikh Saadat replied that they still had the Quran, and that this holy book contained all knowledge. "Does it teach how to cast cannons?" asked the general. "Yes," replied all the sheikhs confidently. This twofold response clearly demonstrates what they are, and what they can be.13 Although harsh, this judgment pales in comparison to the scathing criticisms Ibn Khaldun leveled against the Arab world in the 14th century: “The habits and customs of nomadic life have made the Arabs a rough and fierce people. Crude manners have become second nature to them […]. Such a disposition hinders the progress of civilization […]. Look at all the countries the Arabs have conquered since the earliest centuries: civilization has vanished, as has the population; the very soil seems to have changed its nature. In Yemen, all population centers are abandoned except for a few large cities; the same is true in Arab Iraq; all the beautiful crops with which the Persians had covered it have ceased to exist.” Today, Syria is ruined, and Ifriqiya and the Maghreb still suffer from the devastation wrought by the Arabs.14 Among the Ottomans, the decline seems to have been perceived as early as the 16th century.15 “An indication of this can be found in the series of works, beginning with Koçu Bey, which very clearly indicated the causes of this decline.”16 Visiting Vienna in the 17th century, the Ottoman Evliya Çelebi marveled at the mills, spindles, carts, and other automated devices widespread for various domestic and artisanal uses.17 During the Regency, the Ottoman Mehmet Effendi wrote with interest about the Canal du Midi, its bridges and locks, which deserve “to be counted among the wonders of the world,” as well as the Observatory, where he became enamored with the instruments dedicated to astronomy.18 Concerned about the Ottoman military decline, his compatriot Ibrahim Müteferrika, a renegade of Hungarian origin to whom Muslims owe the introduction of printing three centuries after Gutenberg, noted in 1769 that it was very important to make known and develop the

principles and rules recently invented and generally adopted in the armies of the Nazarene kings and nations, successively perfected by the care and application of sagacious people, and recently brought to the highest degree of perfection by a series of new discoveries, all contrary to the old ones.19 The Ottoman Empire eventually called upon foreign experts to modernize its army during the 18th century, to the point that French became compulsory in the new naval and military schools, not without encountering local resistance, particularly from the ulema and janissaries who would eventually be massacred.20 Traveling through Europe between 1799 and 1803, the Indo-Persian Abu Thalib Khan was astonished by the profusion of sculptures in European cities, which he likens to idolatry, marvel at the technologies in English kitchens, the machines that supply London with water, the scientific experiments that seem "like magic," and the factories that signal a desire to improve the lot of the people: "In England, most work has been made very easy with the help of mechanics; consequently, the price of goods has decreased greatly." The Persian extols these inventions that save "so much time and labor that two servants in England do the work of fifteen slaves in India." Venturing into political science, he notes that British legislation is the product of deliberation and not divine decree: Even penal laws are repealed or amended by Parliament; because Christians, unlike the systems of Jews and Muslims, do not recognize that they have received laws concerning temporal affairs from Heaven, but arrogate to themselves the right to create the regulations that the demands of the times require. 22 Equally intriguing in his eyes is English intellectual life, its learned societies where new inventions are examined while those that are defective are perfected, not to mention "those newspapers without which their life would be unbearable." 23 At the time the Persian made these observations, literacy rates were between 20 and 50% in the major European countries, 25-30% in Japan, and 15-25% in China, but did not exceed 3% of the Ottoman population.24 The average number of books printed annually by the Ottomans barely reached 285 under the caliphate of Abdülhamid (1876-1909), while annual book production in France was between 3,000 and 4,000 at

the end of the First Empire.25 During the second census of the Republic of Turkey in 1945, the illiteracy rate was 95% and 89% among Kurds and Arabs, 76% among Turkish speakers, 51% among Greeks, and 40% among Armenians.26 Towards the Civilizing Mission Thus, Western colonization “This is not the primary cause to which one can attribute the shortcomings of men and the laziness of minds in Muslim countries,” according to the Algerian independence activist Malek Bennabi.27 Isn’t this proof that the fiction that all civilizations are equal is a luxury belief? Those whom misfortune has placed in the weakest cultures cannot afford to adhere to this prejudice, under penalty of withering away without satisfying anyone. Except perhaps for tourists seeking misery to escape their everyday lives, like Flaubert, who was frightened by the modernization of Turkey: “The example of European women is contagious. One of these days, they [Turkish women] will start reading novels […] everything is creaking with age, everywhere!”28 Sensitive to the civilizing mission while condemning the oppressions committed in its name, the orientalist and professor at the Collège de France Sylvain Lévi insisted on the need for Europe to offer its model with tact and not brutality: “We must offer this civilization like our other goods on the local market. […] Let us leave to the native the ability to choose according to his taste, at his time and at his convenience.” 29 “Indeed, the tumultuous history of European colonization also saw a flourishing among some natives of a lively enthusiasm for the contributions of the West: ‘I am convinced that the greater our relations with European gentlemen, the greater our progress in literature, and in social and political affairs,’ argued the Hindu Ram Mohan Roy, a figure of Indian modernization, who approved of the British presence, preferable, in his opinion, to the regimes that preceded it: ‘Divine providence […] has prompted the British to break the yoke of these Muslim tyrants, and to take the oppressed Bengalis under their protection,’ he wrote in a letter to the King of England, to contrast the British presence with the last Mughal princes who had indulged in the most abject atrocities. 30 A proponent of assimilating European knowledge to regenerate his culture, Ram Mohan Roy became enamored with Voltaire and

David Hume, among other figures of the Enlightenment.” In a reversal of position, he criticized, in a letter to the Governor of India, William Pitt Amherst, the opening of a Sanskrit school in Calcutta instead of an institution dedicated to the transmission of Western knowledge: "The Sanskrit system of education would be best suited to keeping the country in ignorance, if that were to be the policy of the British legislature." However, since the improvement of the native population is the government's objective, he encouraged a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, encompassing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, and other useful sciences. And Roy lamented that the imperial budget dedicated to the education of natives was being used to study outdated indigenous traditions: “We were full of hope that this sum would be used to employ talented and trained Europeans to instruct the natives of India in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, and the other useful sciences which European nations have brought to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world […]. We now find that the Government is establishing a Sanskrit school under the responsibility of Hindu pandits in order to teach knowledge already widespread in India.” This seminar […] can only clutter the minds of young people with grammatical subtleties and metaphysical distinctions of limited, if any, use to their holders and to society.31 It was to acquire an English education while bypassing the Christian missions, which exerted a dangerous fascination among the Hindus of Calcutta, that their elites – and not the colonial authorities – took the initiative to found the Hindu College in 1817.32 Resistant to progress The entire failure of the Muslim world during the colonial era stemmed from its refusal to take a sufficient interest in new ideas, even if it meant drawing on them as arguments to combat the injustices of European domination. “It is precisely the natives educated in our methods and ideas who are the most dangerous enemies of our authority and the most resolute supporters of home rule,” lamented the French authorities in Indochina.33 Yet the modernization that affected the Eastern elites was more superficial among these Muslims, who had nevertheless been in contact with the West for

longer than other cultures. Of all the indigenous Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, animist, and Muslim populations subjected to European rule in every corner of the world, the followers of Muhammad were among the most closed to new ideas. Despite a few attempts at modernization, “curiosity was dampened, dulled by the desire for fidelity to Islam […] which, in a way, took precedence over the search for otherness.”34 In India, notes the orientalist Louis Frédéric, while Muslims shunned English schools, Hindus quickly grasped the advantages of a Western education. According to reports from the late 19th century, Muslim attendance at British schools was negligible. A Bengali newspaper noted that, from 1858 to 1875, only 157 Muslims obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree (equivalent to the French baccalaureate) compared to 3,155 Hindus. Despite British efforts to remedy this situation, notably through the Education Commission established in 1882, which encouraged Muslims to pursue education by creating scholarships and supporting specialized associations, little progress was made. While some wealthy families began sending their children to British schools, the majority of middle- and lower-class Muslims remained committed to traditional Quranic education.35 By the 1930s, while Muslim women were attending Indian primary schools to a slightly greater extent, they were almost entirely absent from universities. In 1935 there were 300 Muslim women in high-level institutions, compared to 5,500 Hindu women: relative to the population, the latter were six times more likely than the former to attend higher institutions.36 In the Near East, Muslims are underrepresented in Christian mission schools, which are partly responsible for the emergence of a local bourgeoisie. In 1914, in Ottoman Syria, French Catholic missions, open to all faiths, educated nearly 50,000 students, but counted only 8.7% Muslims in a territory where they made up more than 80% of the population.37 In Egypt, the 25,000 students that French Catholic schools welcomed in 1914 were mainly Syrian-Lebanese Christians.38 The dominance of the latter continued in the interwar period, followed by Catholics, Jews, foreigners, Copts, and Muslims.39 In the 1830s, taking stock of the first French schools established in Algeria, the intendant Genty de Bussy

observed with disappointment: "The natives who come are all Jewish; there is a persistence on the part of the Moors in not sending their children." My prayers, my observations, what I was able to tell them about the government's munificence towards their nation, all failed. It was in vain that the qadi and the municipality had promised me their intervention: nothing came of it. 40. In 1860, Rector Delacroix observed that "the Arab chiefs always have to be begged to send their children, and there are some on whom the generals are obliged to exert a certain pressure to make them accept the grant of a scholarship." 41 In Morocco, the writer Leïla Houari, in her autobiographical novel, describes the prejudices that sabotage access to education for an entire generation: “On the first day of school, unfortunately, I ran into my father. He turned red with anger, grabbed me by the ears, and dragged me home, shouting that as long as he lived, none of his children, least of all a girl, would go to study with those koufars (unbelievers) of French. It was enough that they took our country from us; now they were also turning young people away from religion with their knowledge.”42 In 1921, a colonial official in the Comoros wrote in a despondent tone: “Neglecting the teaching of the Koran in schools in Muslim countries means excluding all children […]. Our failure is complete […]. Discredited because they are Koranic, our schools present a lamentable image.” What can be said of a method which, in a country where we have been established since 1841, has left 142 children in our establishments out of a school population of more than 12,000? 43 Neither the Koranic and Sufi schools which supervised the native masses nor the higher Islamic establishments were in a hurry to acquire modern ideas, as the Europeans were able to do when they appropriated Greco-Arabic science from Toledo. 44 In Algeria, the Jews were more receptive to modern ideas, before they gained access to French nationality and then citizenship: “Their children attend our schools, speak our language, take our costume: without losing their caste spirit, they become clerks of solicitors, notaries, employees of administrations; "They are already initiated into our legislation," observed Baron Jean-Jacques Baude in 1841.45 By the end of the 1850s, the number of Jewish students enrolled in Algiers was 1,700; 80 of

them studied at the city's lycée in 1854, while the number of Muslim students there did not exceed 12.46 In addition to the colonizer's institutions, there were the initiatives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, whose mission was to bring to the Jews of the East "a ray of light in environments sometimes degenerated by centuries of oppression and ignorance," to quote one of its representatives.47 In the land of Islam, the civilizing mission was therefore not limited to Muslims, far from it, and Western Israelites did not fail to deplore the decadence of their brothers in the East, stupefied by Muslim domination. In 1955, on the eve of the independence of the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia, “60 to 90% of Jewish children in Tunisia and Morocco were enrolled in school (100% in Algeria), compared to barely 14% of Muslim children.”48 More Francophile than the Muslims, Algerian Jews petitioned Napoleon III in 1860 to be recognized as French citizens. The undersigned, native Jews of Algeria, beseech Your Majesty to declare them French. Inspired above all by our feelings of gratitude and love for France, which delivered us from an oppressive and barbaric tyranny beyond all expression; Dictated also by the change that the conquest brought to our intellectual state as well as our customs, this wish met with strong support among the elite of the French settled in Algeria.49 This declaration contrasts with the petition addressed thirty years later by 1,700 Muslim notables from Constantine: “Our dearest wish, the thing to which we hold most dear, is to preserve our law, Sharia.”50 Rejecting any acculturation to the West, the ulema Ben Badis (1889–1940) insisted: “The Algerian and Muslim nation is not France. It would not know how to be French. It does not wish to become French.” It could not become France, even if it wanted to.51 In 1938, its Association of Ulema reaffirmed that renouncing Muslim personal status constituted apostasy, which, according to Islamic law, amounted to condemning Muslim candidates for French citizenship to death or ostracizing them.52 In Tunisia, the easing of conditions for Tunisians to acquire French nationality was met in the 1930s with a campaign of intimidation directed against Muslims who chose to become French.53 In Mandatory Syria, while France sought to liberalize the personal status of the

inhabitants, it encountered opposition from Sunni elites who rejected interfaith equality and advocated for the continued right to assassinate those who left Islam.54 Much has been written about the exclusion of the indigenous population from the political process in Algeria by the colonizer, neglecting the latter's refusal to adopt the colonizer's values. 55. But how could one imagine extending citizenship to populations hostile to the principles that underpin it? Colonial Paternalism. Islam was not the only force capable of hindering progress. To indigenous obscurantism were added the cowardice and paternalism of the imperial powers. Europe, despite placing itself under the banner of Enlightenment and progress, never had the courage, whatever the detractors of a "secularist" colonization might say, to directly attack the religion of Muhammad with the most complete refutation, judging Muslims too narrow-minded to warrant subjecting them to a critique of revealed religions. "Secularism is not an exportable commodity," goes a famous saying. Far from displaying the same commitment to secularization as in metropolitan France, France squandered public money among the indigenous population on the financing of Koranic schools and madrasas to cultivate the patronage of sheikhs, ulema, and other feudal charlatans who derived their prestige from absurd beliefs, instead of allocating these funds to a scientific and secular education.57 In 1923, the governor of Niger, Jules Brévié, protested against subsidies for Koranic education and what he considered unfair competition with Christian schools.58 During a Senate commission on the education of indigenous people, the radical Émile Combes, who would later expel thousands of Catholics from metropolitan France at the beginning of the 20th century, asked teachers "to show the greatest respect for the beliefs of the students and their parents, and to scrupulously refrain from the slightest criticism of the Koran."59 In Morocco, Hubert Lyautey, the architect of the protectorate for whom any Westernized Muslim was somehow denatured, banned Christian missionaries from the territory, dismissed an education official guilty of wanting to post a declaration of the rights of man and citizen in Moroccan schools, on the grounds of not offending local traditions.60 This false

reverence for the religion of Muhammad did not even achieve its goal. The Islamic discourse that Europe seeks to domesticate ends up escaping its grasp, while the co-opted notables lose their authority to more literalist currents.61 Superstition can sleep soundly and keep the Islamic world backward, as Muslim "reformers" strive to exonerate Islam from its responsibility for the ills of their societies, preferring to accuse a bad interpretation of the religion: We have worn out our pens and our voices by writing and repeating that the misfortunes of Muslims cannot be attributed to their religion, but to the innovations they have introduced into it and to the fact that they wear Islam like a fur coat turned inside out. This is how the Syrian Rashid Rida (1865-1935), who would support the Saudi monarchy (founded in 1932) at the end of his life, expressed himself, as if to reassure us about what true Islam would be.62 But how can we explain that so many countries that have never adopted this religion are doing better? For the famous Egyptian preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood movement, the greatest danger threatening Islamic nations is not so much the despotism and misery that reign there as "the domination of Westernized culture over the minds of many of its children, especially those who run cultural institutions and determine the cultural direction of our countries."63 Taking the worst of the West and starting over. The height of the misguidance of Muslim societies: of all the foreign doctrines that influence modern politics, only the most harmful escape their sectarianism. It is rather curious to note that, while in principle railing against all Western "paternalism," people in the Third World often turn in practice with eagerness to the Marxists of Europe […] to ask them for the secret of their future, or even for guidance on how to prepare for it.64 Maxime Rodinson is mistaken, however, in attributing the prestige of Marxism-Leninism to the poverty of Muslim societies, to the anti-colonialism of the Soviet Union, or to its victory over Nazism, which had a great impact after 1933 in the Arab East.65 These facts do not explain the lesser appeal of liberal ideas when America, no less victorious, displayed greater prosperity than the communist bloc and placed anti-colonialism on the world agenda.66 Finally, have not Russia and China

themselves conquered Islamic lands, exercising ruthless domination over Muslims?67 Socialism actually enjoyed an advantage over its rivals: by amending Marx's thought, his successors attributed Europe's wealth to the subjugation of the East, flattering the pride and resentment of underdeveloped nations. While its tribal mentalities readily embraced the critique of bourgeois individualism, the East found in this rewriting a convenient explanation for its misery: it no longer stemmed from its own errors but from the innocence violated by a foreign predator. The East took refuge in the camp of the oppressed, sparing itself any self-criticism. It forged a new identity for itself, placed itself on the right side of history, erased the crimes of its past with a stroke of the pen, and exploited the remorse of a Europe eager for absolution. In its distorted form, Marxism offered a "scientific" pretext for envy of the West—a pretext all the more credible because it resonated with the former colonizer. The inconsistencies of the socialist utopia went unnoticed: it subordinated its advent to a phase of development that it declared itself incapable of initiating. As the Communist Manifesto states, only bourgeois societies can draw "barbarous and semi-civilized nations" into the "current of civilization." Enjoying considerable prestige, this idea inspired various collectivist experiments which, from Algeria to the far reaches of sub-Saharan Africa, passing through Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, all proved more mediocre than the last, for reasons that economists explained to indifference.69 It is worth recalling that Jean-Paul Sartre asserted that the standard of living in the USSR before 1965 would be 30 to 40 percent higher than that of France, while the construction of the Berlin Wall signaled, thirty-five years before its fall, the failure of a system that used watchtowers to detain its beneficiaries.70 Thus, in the East, “the worst of the West was taken and grafted onto a culturally religious society,” as Castoriadis noted.71 Watching the famous Cairo speech of 1953 in which Nasser mocked a religious figure who wanted to forcibly veil Egyptian women, Some might find solace in pointing out that, while failing to generate prosperity, Eastern socialism allowed for a secularization that paved the way for freedom.72 But this apparent secularization was confined to

urban elites and was a mere semblance of secularism: there was no real separation of the political and religious spheres, but rather a subordination of religious institutions, admittedly atrophied, to the apparatus of power, for the purpose of social control, or to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam with the official nationalist, even socialist, doctrine.73 Even Nasser imposed Islamic religious education in all schools by a 1957 decree.74 Now, the association between the potentate and the turbaned man is what the Franco-Tunisian writer Albert Memmi calls a game of bluff, a game brilliantly staged by the Egyptian-Swedish director Tarik Saleh in his 2022 thriller, The Cairo Conspiracy. It's a race to see who will ultimately get the better of the other. The tyrant knows that the turbaned man enjoys an inconvenient prestige among the masses. Unable to eliminate him, he orders him to glorify his reign. But even the most intrusive dictator doesn't have total control over the souls of his subjects. They succumb to sermons that claim to be more orthodox than official pronouncements. The reach of these sermons increases thanks to the billions of dollars flowing in from the Gulf states, enriched by oil wealth, where various sects compete with one another to dominate the "space of Islamic meaning." Despotism and Regression: The Muslim world has thus experienced a silent revolution, “the triumph of a Salafist version of Islam at the expense of another possible interpretation of the religious message,” as political scientist Bernard Rougier tells us.77 The superficial modernization of the East during the colonial era has been followed by a return to what controversial preachers liken to an Islam purified of foreign influences. Benefiting from fertile cultural ground, these sects are overwhelming the leaders of the Muslim world, who are forced to make concessions to them in order to remain in power, survive, and avoid ending up like the Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat, assassinated for wanting peace with Israel. The regression of morals that these sects are causing is all the more appalling because it affects peoples who have never been so educated, urbanized, connected, and, consequently, so well served by the vast marketplace of ideas. “The Muslim world appears, by all appearances, to be unaffected by the decline in violence,” notes Professor Steven Pinker, who points out that the

perception that Islam engages in violence from which other societies have managed to extricate themselves is based on statistical data.78 Only 3% of the 1.9 billion Muslims inhabiting this planet live in regimes more liberal than the global average.79 It is in non-Muslim countries that Muslims enjoy the most rights and freedoms, without this seeming to bother those who combat Islamophobia. While a slim majority of non-Muslim countries can boast of being democratic, the number of Muslim societies that cultivate freedom can be counted on the fingers of one atrophied hand. According to the NGO Transparency International, Muslim countries exhibit higher perceived levels of corruption than the global average: on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 corresponds to a high level of corruption, the average score for Muslim countries is 32 compared to a global average of 42 in 2024.80 The prejudices that attribute the overrepresentation of Muslim countries among tyrannical regimes to their poverty do not simply reverse cause and effect. They also neglect the fact that, with equivalent wealth, authoritarianism takes root all the more easily in a Muslim nation.81 Even worse, unlike in non-Muslim countries where there is a link between freedom and prosperity – the former being the source of the latter in nations lacking natural resources – the sociologist Ruud Koopmans notes that, in the Muslim world, the richest countries tend to be the most authoritarian: Prosperity in the Islamic world does not lead to more democracy […] Even in the poorest non-Muslim countries, there is far more freedom than in the Islamic world.82 While all populations, including Muslims, bear the brunt of this tyranny, some are more exposed, such as women and sexual and cultural minorities. Whereas homosexuality is punishable in less than a third of non-Muslim countries, it is in two-thirds of Muslim countries.83 With the exception of Uganda, all the countries where homosexuality is punishable by death are Muslim. On the women's rights front, almost all Muslim-majority countries are in the bottom half of the OECD, UN, and World Economic Forum rankings on gender equality.84 “Many countries in North Africa and the Middle East still prohibit women from moving within their own country or traveling abroad without a man's permission,” lamented Human Rights Watch in a 2023

report.85 Of the twenty countries most affected by child marriage identified by the feminist NGO Girls Not Brides, half are Muslim.86 And, in sub-Saharan Africa, home to the majority of countries with the highest rates of early marriage, this practice appears to be more prevalent among Muslims than among other religious groups.87 According to the WomenStats project, Muslim-majority countries are overrepresented among nations lacking legislation against marital rape and female genital mutilation, and According to UNICEF, these countries are among the nations most affected by female genital mutilation.88 This mistreatment of women is also reflected in educational and health indicators. Female literacy rates are lower than male literacy rates in Muslim-majority countries compared to other regions. Even the life expectancy advantage women typically have over men is lower in Muslim-majority countries.89 And yet, Muslims seem more eager to denounce Islamophobia than oppression within their own communities. The writer Kamel Daoud aptly summarizes this charade when he observes that “in countries where they are a minority, Muslims are obsessed with minority rights. In countries where they are the majority, minorities have no rights.” In a study on the global distribution of religious persecution, American researcher Jonathan Fox notes that 63% of the world's most persecuted religious minorities live in Muslim-majority countries.90 And these figures still neglect non-believers: "The freedom that seems to be the most prominent and most threatened these days in major parts of the world is, in truth, the freedom not to honor any deity and to live as one pleases," observed the Franco-Lebanese political scientist Gilbert Achcar.91 Of the 71 countries that criminalize blasphemy, 32 are Muslim-majority, notes researcher Ahmet Kuru, who also points out that all the countries where renouncing religion is punishable by death are Muslim-majority.92 Fox's figures suggest that Muslims are the least persecuted religious minority in the world for sectarian reasons, while Christians are the most oppressed religious minority.93 "Of the 38 countries where Christians face serious discrimination, 24 “Of them are Muslims,” Koopmans notes.94 Fox observes that average levels of religious discrimination in Muslim-majority states are about four times higher

than in Christian-majority states. He adds: “Even the Christian-majority states of the former Soviet bloc, which have the highest levels of religious discrimination in the Christian world, exhibit less religious discrimination than the average Muslim-majority state.”95 In South Asia, without idealizing it, the status of minorities in India is better than in Bangladesh or Pakistan. In the Middle East, NGOs that accuse Israel of apartheid and genocide curiously neglect to mention that the number of Arab and Muslim citizens thriving there is higher than the number of safe Israelites in the entire Muslim world combined. While Israeli Arabs and Muslims occupy the most prestigious positions in the country and enjoy one of the highest life expectancies in the Arab world, it is an understatement to say that the surrounding societies do not offer the same opportunities to their majorities as to their minorities – and even less so to the Jews, who were expelled from the Muslim world by the hundreds of thousands during the 20th century.96 While, as in all societies, there is room for improvement in Israel and it is appropriate to support liberal currents against extremists, the most important efforts to pacify the region do not fall to the Jewish state. Finally, it should be noted that of the dozen or so countries where Muslims face significant discrimination because of their religion, nearly half of these nations belong to another branch of Islam.97 The religion of peace and love. The main flaw in the clash of civilizations thesis is that it downplays the violence that a culture inflicts upon itself. The Muslim terrorism that plagues Western societies is but a drop in the ocean compared to the situation in the Islamic world, which accounts for the vast majority of attacks perpetrated by Muslims for whom no one observes the precepts of Islam sufficiently. Since 2005, the number of attacks and victims of terrorist violence in Muslim countries has been more than twice as high as in the rest of the world combined.98 For at least a decade, the list of the deadliest terrorist groups has been almost exclusively composed of Muslim groups.99 The Foundation for Policy Innovation notes that 86% of Muslim attacks and 89% of the deaths caused by such attacks since 1979 have occurred in Muslim countries.100 This is enough to put an end to the Eurocentric explanations of Islamist terrorism so popular among unscrupulous commentators.101 Not

only is the Muslim world at war with itself, but it is also bounded by what Huntington called "blood borders."102 Muslim countries are among the most belligerent nations on the planet. All other things being equal, Muslim countries force a larger proportion of their population to serve in their armies than the rest of the world and allocate more men and wealth to the military effort.103 They have a greater propensity to use force in an international crisis. Between 1928 and 1979, while Muslim states resorted to violence to resolve 53.5% of their crises, it was used by the United Kingdom to resolve only 11.5% of its crises, by the United States to resolve 17.9% of its crises, and by the Soviet Union to resolve 28.5% of its crises. Among the major powers, only China is more prone to violence than Muslim states: it has used violence to resolve 76.9% of its crises.104 In the 1990s, data collected by political scientist Ted Robert Gurr showed that Muslims were overrepresented in intercommunal conflicts: there were, in short, three times as many conflicts between civilizations involving Muslims as there were conflicts between non-Muslim civilizations. Conflicts within Islam itself were also more numerous than internal conflicts within any other civilization, including tribal conflicts in Africa.105 Muslim countries remain overrepresented among nations experiencing armed conflicts today.106 And yet, Muslims give the impression of accommodating themselves to this violence that is festering in their societies: it is easier to find deadly protests against cartoons of their prophet produced abroad than mobilizations against the atrocities committed in their own communities.107 “Islam teaches peace. Muslims around the world aspire to live with dignity and according to a sense of justice,” Barack Obama asserted at the United Nations in 2014.108 Is this why the United States restricts its immigration and has only 1% Muslims? Opinion polls, moreover, refute these politically correct pronouncements that leaders repeat to reassure themselves, at the risk of misleading their fellow citizens. In a survey published in 2013 by the Pew Research Center on several Muslim countries, it appears that obscurantist and tyrannical values enjoy a distressing level of popularity there. The median percentages of Muslims in favor of implementing Sharia law are 84% in South Asia, 77% in Southeast

Asia, 74% in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 64% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 18% in Southern and Eastern Europe, and 12% in Central Asia. Among these, the median percentage of Muslims in favor of executing those who leave Islam is 76% in South Asia, 56% in MENA, 27% in Southeast Asia, 13% in Southern and Eastern Europe, and 16% in Central Asia. Those who like to muddy the waters often argue that all cultures and religions have their extremists. They conveniently avoid asking why their proportion is higher in certain communities. The Triumph of Obscurantism: The Global Values Survey, an international research project that probes the beliefs of numerous societies, reveals that prioritizing religion over science in times of conflict is prevalent in the Muslim world, while it is a minority view in non-Muslim countries.109 Prejudices that higher education is less useful to women than to men, and that deny women's ability to perform as well as men in political or economic life, are more prevalent in the Muslim world than elsewhere.110 Corruption, superstition, despotism, fanaticism, wars, contempt for secular knowledge, for difference, and for half of humankind: to echo the question posed by Chakib Arslan, it is no wonder that societies that ingest this toxic cocktail remain on the margins of civilization. The mediocrity of Muslim societies' achievements is less the result of a foreign conspiracy than of ill-suited values. In 1970, the average per capita income of Muslim-majority countries reached two-thirds of that of non-Muslim nations. By 2015, this income had plummeted to less than half: the gap between Islam and the rest of the world has widened over the decades.111 Among the 100 most valuable global companies in terms of market capitalization, the only firm from a Muslim country that stands out is an oil company founded by Americans before being nationalized by the Saudis.112 “The 57 countries with a Muslim majority have roughly 23% of the world’s population, but less than 1% of scientists who produce less than 5% of science and make barely 0.1% of the world’s original research discoveries each year,” lamented the Islamic Development Bank in 2008.113 Similarly, the Muslim world has produced only about 1% of Nobel laureates.114 According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, in 2016, Islamic

countries filed Muslim countries have 65 patents per million inhabitants, compared to six times as many in non-Islamic countries. They devote three times fewer resources to research than non-Muslim countries and produce four times fewer books per capita than the rest of the world.115 These shortcomings explain why Muslim nations struggle to meet the major challenges of our century, such as environmental issues: most of them rank at the bottom of the Environmental Performance Index developed by researchers from Yale and Columbia.116 While Muslims do not have a monopoly on violence and poverty, regional comparisons do not work in their favor either. Koopmans notes that in 2015, the average resident of a Muslim country in Asia earned just over half of what residents of non-Muslim Asia earned. In the same year, the average income of an inhabitant of Islamic Africa was 62% of the income of non-Islamic Africa. The gap is even more striking in sub-Saharan Africa: average per capita income in Islamic countries has fallen from 70% to 33% of that in non-Muslim countries since 1970. In mixed countries, it is not uncommon for Muslim populations to underperform compared to their non-Muslim counterparts. In the Middle East and North Africa, 42% of Muslims have no formal education, compared to 19% of members of non-Muslim minorities.117 The Pew Research Center noted in 2016 that there is a significant and widespread gap in educational attainment between Muslims and Christians in sub-Saharan Africa. According to all school enrollment indicators, Muslim adults in the region—both men and women—are significantly less educated than their Christian counterparts. For example, Muslims are more than twice as likely as Christians in sub-Saharan Africa to have not received formal schooling (65% versus 30%). Moreover, despite an increase in the proportion of adults with formal education in recent decades, the gap between Muslims and Christians has widened across generations, primarily because Muslims have not kept pace with the educational progress made by Christians.118 Faced with these shortcomings, and despite several centuries of progress, the Muslim world persists in confusing the cure with the poison. According to the World Values Survey, Muslims are the group that places the most importance on religion.119 “It is not

certain that, if truly free elections were held throughout the Arab world, the fundamentalists would not prevail," the writer Albert Memmi feared in a moment of great lucidity in 2004, drawing on the Algerian precedent.120 The Arab uprisings confirmed these concerns. Far from embodying the ideals of freedom, as some claimed,121 they fostered dangerous currents, including the Islamic State and its barbarity, which no longer needs describing. The Muslim world gives the impression of only veering from one extreme to the other. The Iranian revolution ousted the Shah only to replace him with someone even worse. The Soviet and American invasions of Afghanistan were followed by the Taliban. The fall of Bashar al-Assad benefited a former al-Qaeda member. It is also dismaying to note that the ills afflicting Islam do not diminish its appeal. The Pew Research Center notes that Islam was the fastest-growing religion between 2010 and 2020, due to high birth rates and low rates of apostasy.122 Given the currents of opinion within Muslim societies and the levels of violence they tolerate, the increasing share of Islam worldwide, if left unchecked, will be one of the greatest challenges to global peace and prosperity in the years to come. Thus, the end of the European colonial era should have propelled the peoples of the East onto the path to prosperity. At least it could have familiarized them with the trivialities of existence, where human happiness and misfortune mingle, to quote the writer Albert Memmi.123 Instead, Muslims have perpetuated the beliefs and institutions responsible for the decadence they have nonetheless lamented. But not content with having transformed the cradle of civilization into its tomb, the Muslim world is extending the borders of its hell to the most prosperous countries, like arsonists who ravage the lush gardens in their path. 6 Assault on the Free World We are but yesterday's people, and already we fill the empire, your cities, your islands, your fortresses, your towns, your councils, the camps, the tribes, the decuries, the palace, the senate, the public square. Tertullian False Starts The author of these lines learned one day that his father, originally from the Comoros, opposed the independence of his native archipelago: "We weren't ready to assume those responsibilities," he calmly admitted. Using cunning to acquire a

passport while still a minor, he obtained this precious document allowing him to travel and retain the French nationality he cherished, and which others will lose with a regret they don't always dare to confess. Years later, his mother, who remained on an archipelago as devoid of essential services as it is dotted with mosques, lost her life at sea, attempting to reach Mayotte in search of medical care. After the mourning period, life resumed its course, almost unchanged. Few voices were raised in outrage at the state of a nation that made this tragedy possible, half a century after independence. As if this tragedy were an inescapable fate that no society could avert with better governance. Thus, the narrow streets of this country, the fragile houses beneath their corrugated iron roofs rusted by the sea air, remained frozen, far removed from the currents of a changing world. Further north, the end of the Algerian War did not only expel millions of pieds-noirs, Jews, and harkis, all acutely aware of the insecurity that would follow the end of French rule, in violation of the Évian Accords meant to guarantee "the protection of their persons and property." At the same time as the Algerians drove out the Europeans, many of them found refuge among the non-Muslims to benefit from the security unavailable in their new homeland. This nation, it must be acknowledged, was born, like so many others, under the seal of misunderstanding. The wretched of the earth, it was believed, were fighting for the equality that Europe had denied them. “There is not a colonized person who does not dream at least once a day of taking the colonizer’s place,” wrote Frantz Fanon. This at least suggested that the former would emulate the virtues of the latter. Driven by noble intentions, the couriers and other supporters of the independence movement believed they were working towards a better world. “We want to see this country free, independent, with the help of France. Then, France will be able to count on us and on all of Islam,” proclaimed the independence activist Messali Hadj, who would end his days in France because of his exclusion from the movement he had helped to create: his supporters would be decimated by the FLN during the war of independence, in which this faction claimed more victims among the indigenous population than among the French. Humanists were disillusioned when they

discovered that Algerians were far from wanting to replace colonial rule with a more respectable regime, like the Confederates who revolted against Lincoln in the name of their right to own Black people. "Women should go back to their couscous," insisted Mohamed Khider, one of the FLN leaders, once the revolution was over.4 For the Algerian-born Frenchman Pierre Maillot: It wasn't a question of fighting for socialism, agrarian reform, women's liberation, or democratic freedoms. It was about liberating the land of Islam from the presence of the infidel, about resuming the reconquest that dates back to the Crusades. It was about jihad. In those early years of independence, I understood that the FLN would never gain the support of the masses with the themes of democracy, revolution, secularism, modernity—in short, with the Western themes it reserved for its foreign policy.5 This feeling is corroborated by the proclamations of President Ben Bella, who asserted that Islamism offered Algeria and the Arab world "the best chances of real liberation," ten years before the outbreak of a civil war that claimed more than 150,000 lives following the Algerians' decision to hand over the keys to their country to the Islamic Salvation Front.6 Few, like the independence activist Mostefa Lachéraf, warned that "Islam carries within it the weight of those values specific to an archaic rural civilization likely to slow down the modernization of the country."7 The Failure of Independence: Mired in backwardness due to their attachment to superstitions and poor choices, undermined by corruption and conflict, many of these new nations experienced a hemorrhage of their vital forces, much to the embarrassment of their leaders. Since the 1930s, the time of the first wave of migration to what was then the "metropole," Algerian nationalist leaders have always linked the necessity of national independence to the resolution of the emigration issue. According to them, Algeria's independence would be enough to stop the departures and allow the "return" of Algerians to build their country. [...] But, once independence was achieved in 1962, the predictions of "return" did not materialize. The FLN's 1964 Charter of Algiers acknowledges that "the causes of Algerian immigration to Europe [...] are closely linked to the level of development." It cannot be mitigated or slowed down but will

only cease with the disappearance of its principal causes.9 But these causes must first be identified. The Franco-Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun laments: “Today, the Maghreb countries are self-reliant—not entirely, since the human deforestation of this land continues. Big capital continues to methodically drain the land of its most precious lifeblood: its people. Yesterday’s colonial violence is perpetuated today in an even more pernicious way, since the demands of need (unemployment in the countries of origin) are compounded by the complicit cooperation of the local bourgeoisies.”10 Reading this prose, one would think that European firms had crisscrossed the villages of the Maghreb to abduct men, following the model of the Turks stealing the Christians destined for the Sultan’s guard. Attributing migrations to the legacy of colonialism or the need for reconstruction is to lie to everyone and do a disservice to those affected. Certainly, the pattern of formerly colonized peoples fleeing to the former colonial power was repeated in many places. Many Pakistanis settled in England. They were fleeing a nation born of a deadly partition, marked by population exchanges to separate Muslims from Hindus: "The idea that Hindus and Muslims can create a common nation is a dream," proclaimed the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In reality, the latter only tolerated the former when they dominated them. However, other nations managed to turn the situation to their advantage. For example, fewer Singaporeans migrated to European construction sites. It would have been very difficult to recruit them for low-skilled jobs at a pittance, even if their wages were higher than those in the Global South. And for good reason: the city-state, which few people believed would be successful after its expulsion from Malaysia, is now among the richest places on Earth, whereas its per capita income was barely above that of Africa sixty years earlier.13 The colonial legacy is not a curse that condemns the native population to perpetual poverty, as evidenced by Asia's progress. Especially since some of them did not start from nothing. At the end of the war of independence, Algeria had 10,000 km of paved roads, 4,300 km of railways, 10 ports including 3 of international importance, 20 civil airfields, 16,000 km of high-voltage lines,

30,000 hospital beds, among other infrastructure. 14 Just as rural exodus was the solution for the poor in search of a better life, the Muslim presence in the West stems from the failure of independence, if indeed this word is appropriate for countries that have exchanged foreign domination for the yoke of native tyrants. Exporting Superstition: Thus, Europe mourned the loss of its colonies more quickly than the formerly colonized mourned Europe, which remains for many the surest way to feed their families back home.15 The failure of independence movements should logically have dissuaded newcomers from the customs that had prevented their ancestors from escaping poverty and oppression, and instead led them to embrace the codes of their adopted societies, which offered them a security unavailable in their countries of origin. In high school, I had the opportunity to compare the fate of girls in my country with that of young French girls. […] we, the young girls of the early sixties, had before us models of life more seductive than those of our fathers and mothers, who attracted us like so many magnets. Thus, unknowingly, we were preparing ourselves for a clash of cultures and generations that would claim far more victims than the French could—and still cannot—imagine. This is what one can read in the writings of Djura, the French singer of Kabyle origin, who was threatened by her brothers because of her marriage to a Frenchman.16 Alas, the revolt of the moderns against the ancients did not take place. At least, it did not reach the scale it deserved. Too many exiles chose to perpetuate their reactionary traditions by multiplying absurd demands: mosques, Koranic schools, prayer rooms in the workplace to invoke their imaginary god, not to mention the right to drape themselves in clothing evoking another age.17 Violence, tribalism, and obscurantism: the ills that plague the Muslim world have been transplanted to the heart of Europe, with the blessing of its leaders. “What do you expect me to do if France becomes Islamized?” replied Education Minister Lionel Jospin to a journalist in 1989. “We French have long since finished with our religious wars, and yet several centuries have not allowed us to forget their cruelties. Who among us would want to see new ones reborn on our soil?” worried historian Fernand Braudel about

this new wave of immigration, more hostile to local values than previous waves. The first major explosion of this war, waged at the heart of liberal societies, occurred with the Salman Rushdie affair. Three centuries after the execution of Thomas Aikenhead, the last Briton condemned to death for blasphemy in 1697, another British national, himself born into a Muslim family, had a price put on his head for allegedly mocking a supposed prophet about whom almost nothing is known. Moreover, this sentence did not originate from local authorities and could not be regularly challenged by the individual concerned. It was pronounced 4,000 kilometers from London, by the chief fanatic of Iran, to whom France had offered asylum a decade earlier instead of expelling him. Few have grasped the significance of this precedent. Muslim societies had hitherto been content to assassinate or persecute their most enlightened minds within their borders, at least leaving them one escape route. But, for the first time, the law of Muhammad was giving itself the means to apply to all of humanity, annexed within the prison of Islam. As Bangladeshi activist Taslima Nasreen so aptly puts it, these maneuvers tell critics of Islam that they will be safe nowhere, especially when they have themselves freed themselves from this religion.21 This condemnation would, however, have remained a dead letter if Europe had not welcomed so many Muslims ready to participate in this inquisition, as shown by the thousands of demonstrators demanding Rushdie's head in the streets of England and France without the countries concerned deigning to forcibly expel them. A poll published on October 20, 1989, revealed that 28% of British Muslims wanted Rushdie dead, while nearly two-thirds called for the public destruction of his work.22 A convert to Islam, the renowned Cat Stevens supported Rushdie's death sentence without facing any repercussions from the British justice system.23 "Death is, no doubt, a little too kind for him," judged Iqbal Sacranie, secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, before being knighted by the Queen of England a few years later.24 This war was not confined to England: it was waged everywhere against those who had helped to disseminate his work. His Japanese translator was murdered. His Norwegian publisher was shot. His Italian publisher was stabbed. The West

was experiencing an unprecedented regression: "When I was in Paris, a book that refutes the sanctity of the prophet Jesus, the dogma that forms the foundation of Christianity, was about to be published." Since this idea was popular, it seems that more than two hundred thousand copies were printed. The prohibition against priests reading this book had no effect," recounted the Ottoman Hayrullah Efendi in the 1860s regarding Renan's Life of Jesus, who, although unjustly sanctioned professionally, never feared for his life.25 While our world has acquired, after so much bloodshed, the right to question religions, exercising one's freedom of conscience once again exposes one to dangers that were thought to be a thing of the past. "Denouncing Islam in France carries no danger, except that of acquiring easy notoriety," asserted the journalist Alain Gresh, fifteen years after this episode.26 The year these lines were published, the filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a Muslim in the Netherlands, assassinated for making a film denouncing the status of women in the land of Islam. His collaborator, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, of Somali origin, also received death threats. Fleeing the homeland that had once welcomed Descartes, she found refuge in the United States, becoming "the first refugee from Western Europe since the Holocaust," in the words of Rushdie, himself exiled in America, before being overtaken by Muslim fanaticism.27 Europe, which prides itself on having built its unity on the protection of minorities, is once again becoming a region that the most courageous individuals must flee to escape the oppression of a foreign religion.28 Then came the violence that claimed more than a hundred lives following the "Danish cartoons affair," among other atrocities committed in the name of the same superstition. Following this sequence of events, Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard and Swedish artist Lars Vilks, along with their colleagues Flemming Rose and Carsten Juste, were placed under police protection for the rest of their lives. The journalists of Charlie Hebdo later paid the ultimate price for defending the freedom to criticize religions and must now work from a secret location to avoid being massacred a second time. Its former director, Philippe Val, also under protection, was ordered to install a safe in his apartment. In 2018, the authorities even suggested that he leave

the country for a while before granting him enhanced protection. This is a situation unprecedented in our democracies since the birth of the press.29 According to an internal count by the Protection Service, "a third of close protection missions today concern individuals who have made hostile, critical, or ironic statements toward Islam, Islamism, or Muslims."30 The Islamization of the European Political Order. Professor Gilles Kepel coined the term “atmospheric jihadism” to account for this diffuse threat hanging over our societies.31 A threat that the influx of populations hostile to their values has only exacerbated: “There are probably more jihadist sympathizers in Europe today than there were ten years ago,” estimated researcher Hugo Micheron in January 2025.32 It is no coincidence that the dystopia by writer Michel Houellebecq, in which a Muslim accedes, without the slightest resistance, to the presidency of the Republic, has acquired such an international audience.33 But reality is more pernicious than fiction. In a satirical vein, Submission depicts an Islamic takeover through elections, the adoption of Sharia law in Parliament before its publication in the Official Journal. Yet, for the fanatics of Muhammad, there is no need to sit at the heart of the institutions to consolidate their power. They need only reach a critical mass for freedom to falter under the weight of numbers, until the overwhelming force of fear compels our societies to internalize their norms, even informally: “In Bangladesh and India, at least ten fatwas have been issued against me to date. Although these are prohibited by law in both countries, the fundamentalists who issue them have so many followers that there is never a shortage of volunteers to carry them out,” Nasreen writes. In Europe, too, signs that the boundaries of civilization are shrinking continue to multiply. In 1995, the death of Khaled Kelkal, the first Muslim terrorist raised in France, was followed by clashes between locals and police in the suburbs of Lyon, the site of the first "ethnic" riots in the 1970s. In 2001, the book Les Territoires perdus de la République (The Lost Territories of the Republic) relayed the testimonies of teachers confronted with the rise of sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism among French schoolchildren of Muslim culture. In 2004, the National Education Inspector Jean-

Pierre Obin corroborated their experience in a report, noting this "astonishing and cruel reality: in France, Jewish children—and they are the only ones in this situation—can no longer be educated in just any school." In 2006, the Belin publishing house decided to blur the face of Muhammad in history textbooks for middle school students in response to fears of unrest.36 In early 2020, a young teenager had to be withdrawn from school and was subjected to a witch hunt because she had criticized a fictional character.37 A few months later, a teacher was murdered for the first time in French history by a Muslim, with the complicity of some students, because of the lesson he was teaching.38 This crime was repeated three years later.39 “Four out of five teachers say they are afraid of facing potentially conflictual situations with some students related to their religious beliefs. And more than half say they have already censored themselves for fear of incidents.” “No educational level, no discipline, no subject, no territory is now spared,” noted Obin in 2023, pointing out that religious protests are twice as frequent in priority education zones, which are characterized by a high concentration of Muslim populations.40 What are we to make of the state of a nation where those who are supposed to transmit its values fear for their lives? Thus, all the ingredients for what a former French president called the “partition” of the country are being put in place.41 This decivilization is not limited to France. The United Kingdom offers one of the most striking examples of the decay of a country that was once one of the bastions of liberal democracy. The nation that forced many sovereigns to tackle slavery during the 19th century has become a rear base for international jihadism, to the point that its capital has been nicknamed "Londonistan": jihadists and hate preachers have benefited from appalling tolerance there, allowing a radical ecosystem to take root in England.42 In 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury sparked controversy by arguing that Sharia law for Muslims would become inevitable in civil matters.43 Now, the penetration of Islam is such that the "justice" system of the country that invented Habeas Corpus is quicker to bring a Turkish refugee to trial for burning a Quran than to crack down on Pakistani gangs specializing in the rape of white girls, let alone the agents who

have covered up their crimes.44 Not content with having exiled Rushdie, the United Kingdom has, in 2018, felt obliged to refuse asylum to a Christian Pakistani woman threatened with death in her native country, because of the fanatics present on British soil 45. Despite this, the English have no problem entrusting the supervision of their education system to an Islamist who invites a Saudi dignitary into his schools imploring God to "finish off the Jews 46". In some cases, British police are quicker to arrest activists who insult Hamas or Hezbollah than people who openly call for the murder of Jews in the street.47 Meanwhile, the former Scottish First Minister shamelessly appears alongside the wife of Turkish dictator Erdoğan at an organization dedicated to strengthening the influence of Islam in our societies, while the leader of the Scottish Labour Party calls on minorities from the Indian subcontinent to take control of the government and schools at a rally where the flag of the “Republic” of Pakistan is displayed.48 It is as if the British, through their passivity towards this fifth column, are deliberately implementing the quip by the US Vice President that the UK could become the first Islamist state with nuclear weapons, if Pakistan is left out.49 After welcoming a large Moroccan and Turkish population while having the good sense to entrust the management of Muslim worship to the Saudis, Belgium is realizing that some of its neighborhoods have become a rear base for terrorism, to the point that the kingdom, along with the Scandinavian countries, is among the Western countries that have sent the most soldiers to ISIS in proportion to their population.50 On Belgian public television, elected officials calmly explain their desire to establish an Islamic state in the land of Rubens, while Islamists who do not speak French and rejoice in the assassination of cartoonists are rising to the highest local offices, without anyone demanding their expulsion.51 The Brussels Parliament allows a Pakistani imam to recite, within its walls, surahs from the Quran that call for the conversion of infidels, at the risk of turning Houellebecq's satire into a documentary.52 The Low Countries are discovering that some of their schools are riddled with student fanaticism. and teachers, and, in an admission of powerlessness, resolves to relocate a football match involving

Israelis to Viktor Orbán's Hungary 53. The brainwashing has, in this country, reached such a level that a Belgian journalist, in order to rule on the morality of the wearing of the veil by little girls, refers, not to common decency, but to Muslim law which, she tells us, authorizes it from puberty, between nine and twelve years old: "This moment is considered, in a way, as the moment when one becomes a woman capable of discernment. “No one at the newspaper is outraged by the crimes that this reasoning can justify.” 54. In Germany, the Berlin police chief advises Jews and homosexuals to be careful in certain Arab neighborhoods. 55. The nation that opened its doors to more than a million Muslims without any checks is discovering the existence of borders in the heart of Goethe’s country, where demonstrations by thousands of fanatics in favor of the caliphate are becoming commonplace. 56. The country proud of its Willkommenskultur now sees Muslims based in Cologne unashamedly inviting a representative of the Taliban, while a former sex slave of the Islamic State flees to Iraq after meeting her torturer near Stuttgart. 57. In Denmark, Parliament, under pressure from a coalition of Muslim dictatorships, adopts a law contrary to freedom of expression to prohibit the burning of the Quran. 58. In Sweden, where burning a Quran is enough to set an entire neighborhood ablaze, the authorities are quicker to prosecuting the alleged blasphemers rather than those who threaten them, who will ultimately murder one of their own before a local court condemns his comrade.59 These dystopian cases are just a sample of the anomalies to which Europeans have become accustomed. They deserve an entire book to be devoted to them. Whose fault is it? Far from drawing the necessary lessons from these anomalies, each country, Micheron notes, has striven to explain Muslim fanaticism by putting its own system on trial, without seeing that this fanaticism manifests itself in different contexts.60 And we read in Virginie Despentes's words about the Charlie Hebdo assassins: "I also loved their despair." Their way of saying – you don't want me, you don't want to see me, you think I'm going to live my life hunched over in a ghetto, enduring your hostility without disturbing your week of sales shopping or your round of golf – I'm going to burst into your fucking realities that I

hate because not only do they exclude me, but they also put me in jail and condemn all my people to the dishonor of abject poverty. 61 This prose doesn't just reek of paternalism. It ignores the fact that poverty has never been the common denominator of Muhammad's fanatics. In their study of 1,200 Muslims in France, Germany, and England, two researchers observed that adherence to fundamentalism increased with the level of wealth of the respondents' families. 62 Socioeconomic status "is not a fundamental factor in adherence to fundamentalism." 63 Wasn't the West poorer than the Muslim world today when the former proclaimed human rights and laid the foundations of modern democracy? While our era is saturated with calls for deconstruction, to the point that the fight against racism and sexism justifies changing novel titles or spelling rules, it is curious that it persists in refusing to acknowledge the danger of a fable that worships a murderer. The enemies of our civilization may claim to follow the same book, prophet, and god whose laws sow desolation wherever they are in force, but cowardice makes it easier to blame the West's shortcomings than the scourges of Muslim societies, even though everyone can see at a glance that the latter have no lessons in tolerance to offer the former. The Unbearable Lightness of Mind of Muslims: “To confuse an entire community—of origin, culture, or belief—with the actions of a few individuals who claim to represent or benefit from it is to pave the way for injustice. To allow such discourse to take root through our silence is to accustom our consciences to exclusion, establishing within them the legitimacy of discrimination and the respectability of conflation,” argues journalist Edwy Plenel against criticisms of Islam while remaining silent on the state of freedoms and minorities in the Muslim world.64 But if our societies are guilty of indifference toward the prejudices they harbor, what can be said of the passivity of Muslims in the face of the countless crimes committed in their name? It is indeed common to minimize the responsibility or the dangerousness of Islam on the grounds that the oppressors who claim to represent it are a minority. This commonplace overlooks the fact that history is always the work of a handful of motivated individuals. 65 “Every revolution is the work

of a minority," observed the historian Alphonse Aulard, referring to those Bolsheviks who would change the destiny of Russia and the world. 66 Were not the conquerors who Islamized the East, in their origins, a tiny minority immersed in a world dominated by "the forces of evil and darkness," as the Moroccan intellectual Ali Kettani proudly proclaims? 67 Did not the jihadists who transformed Syria into a field of ruins represent only 0.3% of the local population? 68 Active minorities are all the more formidable because the communities from which they emerge—and which constitute their recruitment pool—offer them no resistance. "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything," said Albert Einstein. This is undoubtedly why the Germans were urged to reflect on the crimes they had tolerated, even though the agents of the Third Reich constituted only a small fraction of the German population.69 Yet the most unbearable aspect of the current situation is the difficulty in discerning, within the vast cohort of so-called moderate Muslims, any signs of indignation and detachment from the countless atrocities perpetrated in their name, through the denunciation of the texts and traditions that fanatics apply with rigorous fidelity.70 In 2003, Western countries were the sites of some of the largest demonstrations in modern history in reaction to the American invasion of Iraq.71 These internal protests within the West have no equivalent in the Muslim world, where drawings are enough to rouse the crowds. While the attack on Charlie Hebdo was followed by an international demonstration in Paris, some pointed out the low presence of French people of Muslim immigrant origin. Our institutions do not benefit from the support of any Muslim civil society worthy of the name, despite the constant attacks they endure. "Why are there so few imams in France capable of delivering a calming message?" "asked La Croix to a theologian who now works for the Comorian dictatorship 73. In Western media, the scarcity of Muslim personalities and organizations that dedicate their existence to the fight against the countless scourges that run through Islam contrasts with the profusion of loudmouths specializing in denouncing Islamophobia, such as a bloodthirsty dictator who would be indignant about the

aversion his regime arouses or this imam who takes advantage of the commemoration of the assassination of Samuel Paty to denounce the supposed stigmatization of Muslims and not the terror that has taken hold of schools due to the actions of a significant portion of them 74. In France, Muslims seeking information about their faith, online or in Islamic bookstores, are mostly confronted with fundamentalist discourse, as highlighted by Bernard Rougier’s team, which deplores the near absence of liberal or historical-critical resources. 75. After three years of infiltrating 70 French mosques, a journalist using a pseudonym revealed that fundamentalism is not limited to establishments designated as radical by the authorities: one imam at a mosque in Paris's 11th arrondissement advocates for the caliphate, another establishment in L'Haÿ-les-Roses distributes books supporting marital rape, and yet another mosque in Créteil provides its worshippers with books justifying forced child marriage. 76. "Enlightened Islam or new Islamic thinkers, if they exist, struggle to find a foothold among French Muslims," laments an official report. 77. Because it would be devastating for Islam and those who derive their power from superstition, the historical-critical approach to Islamic texts is nonexistent in Muslim circles, to the point that a French media outlet considers the idea that the Quran is the work of human beings to be "revolutionary." 78. And the historian Jacqueline Chabbi exclaimed indignantly: “The other monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism, have produced their critical histories. But if you look for critical history of the beginnings of Islam, you won’t find any […].” Muslim scholars, critical history, they don't know what it is 79. Even the most official bodies of Islam in France and Europe are united in denying the scourges that plague their religion, like the rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris who refuses to call Hamas a terrorist group, to designate Algeria as a dictatorship or to admit the existence of virulent anti-Semitism within Islam: all these attitudes amount to giving carte blanche to oppressors and fanatics 80. This nonchalance can only infuriate us, the disciples of Sartre: have we not learned that indifference to evil is a choice and that certain silences are complicit? Worse still, contrary to the disqualification of nationalist sentiment by

Europeans because of the crimes committed in its name, contrary to the waves of debaptisms that Christian churches register with each scandal that affects them, Muslims redouble their ostentation in affirming their faith as the crimes it inspires are displayed for all to see.81 This ostentation is all the more dubious as fundamentalists assign it an objective of proselytism and intimidation.82 Never before have we seen so many Muslim establishments, veils, bearded men, halal products, demands, bookstores, schools, street prayers and Islamic incursions into businesses and public services as since images of beheadings, floggings, stonings, lynchings, persecutions and attacks committed by Muslims in all corners of the world have become accessible to everyone. The ban on displaying religious symbols in French public schools, regularly denounced in the international press, is incomprehensible without considering the increase in the wearing of Islamic symbols recorded after 9/11, as well as the pressure that fundamentalists exerted on their moderate or non-believing peers. There is a dissonance in proudly displaying the emblems of a doctrine that sows devastation wherever it takes root. It is as if one were parading under the insignia of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist sect, while being surprised to attract suspicious glances. Even if each individual is responsible for their own actions and not those of members of their community, it is reasonable to expect a community tainted by its most turbulent members to at least show some palpable discomfort. This is even more true for those who value collective reputation, to the point of being overrepresented among the perpetrators of "honor killings." Far from curbing this proselytizing zeal, the ills associated with the Muslim religion seem to fuel it. Just as the rejection of Islam is rooted in the state of the Muslim world, mistrust of Muslims feeds on the indifference they show toward the ills of their culture, as if they were resigned to them. Fifth columns and cultural secessions: While Europe has welcomed significant Muslim populations, fundamentalist groups have never made a secret of their desire to prevent their integration. ISESCO, an agency of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, thus urges the "immunization of the second, third, and even fourth generations of these communities,

who have settled outside the Islamic world, against cultural assimilation and the loss of their Islamic identity." The same sentiment was echoed by the countries of origin, eager to forge a fifth column within Western societies to exert pressure and prevent the spread of healthier values in the Global South: “I discourage you, as far as my people, the Moroccans, are concerned, from attempting to circumvent nationality laws, because they will never be 100% French. That, I can assure you,” King Hassan II of Morocco cynically declared to journalist Anne Sinclair, two years after stating that “immigration should not tend towards integration.” The fact that the infamous Creil headscarf affair was resolved by the intervention of a foreign monarch foreshadowed the problems our societies would encounter. The counterpart to the pressure exerted on Muslim diasporas is the denigration of those most acculturated to democratic values. The Algerian dictatorship's relentless persecution of writers Kamel Daoud and Boualem Sansal is one example among others of the maneuvers of these regimes 89. Multiplying attacks against the West, brandishing the threat of a fight "between the Cross and the Crescent", the Turkish president has also continued to invite diasporas established in Europe not to integrate while encouraging them to behave like enemies within: "I understand very well that you are against assimilation. “We cannot expect you to assimilate. Assimilation is a crime against humanity,” declared the leader of a country that has rid itself of its minorities in order to homogenize Anatolia and that does not hesitate to use Turkish demographics for electoral blackmail and to threaten European governments.90 Suspicions of disloyalty directed against minorities rightly revive bad memories in Europe. However, it would be criminal to ignore the wrongdoers who loudly proclaim their desire to use dissenting communities to destroy us. Did you say “far right”? “If immigration in Europe poses a problem for far-right nationalists and Muslim fundamentalists, it may be because it works,” writes historian John Tolan, who doesn’t deem it necessary to refer to any studies to support his assertion.91 Can one argue that the integration of Turks is working when the diasporas established in Europe vote more for the Islamist Erdoğan than their compatriots who remained in

Turkey?92 In the last Turkish elections, the man who served four months in prison in his country for declaring that “the minarets will be our bayonets, the domes our helmets, the mosques our barracks, and the believers our soldiers” garnered between 67% and 75% of the vote in the second round in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium against his Kemalist rival.93 How can one not see this as a hostile gesture toward their host society? In France, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas—two dictatorial factions—enjoy a positive image among 59% and 19% of Muslims, respectively, compared to 10% and 3% of the general population. Nearly half of Muslims consider holding babies captive in tunnels and deliberately massacring and dismembering teenagers dancing at a festival to be acts of resistance against Israeli settlement activity, compared to 10% of the general population. Support for authoritarian Muslim factions and barbaric acts increases with religious practice.94 Muslims' opinions are no more liberal or progressive on domestic policy issues. 63% of Muslims in France say that homosexuality is an illness or a perversion, compared to 14% of Catholics and 10% of non-believers. Muslims are three times more likely than the rest of society to say that "violence against homosexuals is sometimes understandable." When asked whether a woman should obey her husband, 56% of French Muslims answer in the affirmative, compared to 5% of the rest of the population. More than half of French Muslims believe that Jews have too much power in the economy, politics, and the media, compared to between a quarter and a fifth of the general population. Muslims are about three times more likely than the rest of the population to express antipathy towards Jews and to blame them for economic crises.97 After the Mila case—the teenage girl who was taken out of school and placed under police protection for insults directed at an invisible being—a survey revealed that only 34% of Muslims supported the right to criticize, even excessively, a religious belief, symbol, or dogma, compared to 50% of the French population.98 Five years after the attack on Charlie Hebdo, two-thirds of French Muslims justified the lawsuit brought against the newspaper for publishing the cartoons of Muhammad, compared to one-fifth of the general population. Furthermore, 18% of

Muslims stated that they did not condemn the perpetrators of the attacks, compared to 8% of the rest of the population. 40% of them stated that they prioritized their religious convictions over republican values, compared to 17% for the rest of the French population.99 Unlike the rest of society, Muslims are overwhelmingly opposed to the religious neutrality of government employees and are more resistant to combating the influence of fundamentalists in society. Despite the abuses they inspire everywhere, the proportion of Muslims who declare that they consider the laws of their religion more important than common law rises to 57% for 15-24 year olds.100 Only 42% of Muslims consider it essential to respect the principle of secularism, even if it offends those who cannot express their beliefs as they wish, compared to 85% of the general population.101 16% of Muslims do not express total condemnation of the perpetrator of the assassination of Dominique Bernard in October 2023, compared to 5% of the general population. This rate rises to 31% for educated Muslims.102 On the knowledge front, Muslims are more inclined than other groups to challenge the authority of science: 76% of Muslims prioritize religion over science when the two conflict over the creation of the world, compared to 22% among followers of other religions and 19% among the French population as a whole.103 Does their relative disdain for secular knowledge partly explain their greater vulnerability to academic failure?104 In the United Kingdom, nearly a third of Muslims support the death penalty for apostates.105 A slight majority of Muslims believe that homosexuality should be illegal, compared to 5% of the general population. Muslims are seven times more likely than others to say that women should always obey their husbands.106 A year after the Danish cartoon controversy, more than two-thirds of British Muslims believed that those who published the cartoons and those who insult Islam should be prosecuted. One-fifth of British Muslims say they sympathize with Bin Laden. After the Charlie Hebdo massacre, more than a quarter of British Muslims said they sympathized with the killers' motives.107 In Belgium, a large-scale survey of Brussels high school students concluded that Muslims are three times more likely to hold anti-Semitism, homophobia, and

sexism than non-believers.108 While the less rigorous associate the rejection of Islam with the far right, Muslims are actually the most receptive to the values traditionally attributed to this political stance. In comparison, European nationalist and populist right-wing movements could almost be mistaken for clubs of '68ers.109 Furthermore, those who like to equate the rejection of Islam with fascism are unaware of Adolf Hitler's fascination with the religion of Muhammad: "We have the misfortune of not having the right religion. [...] The Muslim religion [...] would be much more appropriate than this Christianity, with its softening tolerance," he confided to his Minister of Defense, Albert Speer.110 A particularly criminogenic religion. Thus, Muslims constitute the most xenophobic group, resistant to science, freedom of conscience, pluralism, equality, and the separation of the spiritual and the temporal. They are more homophobic, sexist, anti-Semitic, and obscurantist than average and tolerate violence more readily. How can we be surprised by their overrepresentation in crime statistics? Estimates of the proportion of French Muslims in the prison population range from 20% to 60%.11 In Germany, the proportion of Muslims in German prisons is around 20%, and sometimes exceeds 50% in juvenile detention centers.112 The ten most common nationalities of foreign perpetrators of rape and sexual assault in Germany in 2017 included eight Islamic countries.113 In the Netherlands, the proportion of Muslims in Dutch prisons and juvenile delinquency was 20% and 26% respectively in 2008.114 In Amsterdam, a study by sociologists, based on police data for 2007, showed that 36% of suspects arrested for acts of violence against homosexuals were of Moroccan immigrant origin.115 In Belgium, the proportion of Muslims in prison in 2015 was estimated at 35%. It represented 7.6% of the total population.116 In Switzerland, the 2000 federal census showed that Muslims accounted for nearly a quarter of those incarcerated in Switzerland, while representing less than 5% of the population.117 In 2009, Norwegian police revealed that immigrants of non-Western origin were responsible for "all reported rapes" in Oslo.118 While the President of the French Republic, in a cowardly act, described the rise in anti-Semitic acts as

inexplicable, it should be noted that Muslims are overrepresented among the perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence in all Western European countries.119 From the assassination of Ilan Halimi to the murder of Mireille Knoll, including the Ozar Hatorah massacre, all French Jews killed because they were Jewish have been killed by Muslims since the beginning of the 21st century. century. The myth of “living together.” To these unflattering facts for proponents of successful integration is added the refusal of Muslims to embrace mixed marriages. “Without intermarriage, there is no integration,” Fernand Braudel warned. “No French woman could have been seen with a young Arab man without risking trouble. Almost everything bows down to love. Except colonialism,” wrote Messali Hadj about French Algeria, where communities regarded each other with suspicion, although he carefully avoided describing the fate reserved for Algerian women in relationships with non-Muslims.120 The rest is history. Today, Muslims in France are almost twice as likely as the French population as a whole to reject the idea of marriage to someone of another faith.121 Some have tried to exaggerate the number of these unions, such as the anthropologist Emmanuel Todd, who in 2009 argued that "the populations of Muslim origin in France are generally the most secularized and integrated in Europe, thanks to a high rate of mixed marriages."122 The demographer Michèle Tribalat debunked these myths, which focused on individuals' passports rather than their origins.123 Of all the migratory groups present in France, Muslims are among the few who remain closed off to marriage after two generations, while the descendants of European, Afro-Christian, and Indochinese migrants are largely exogamous. The only individuals of Muslim ancestry who are predominantly exogamous are the product of a mixed and secularized couple. This category remains an exception.124 This demonstrates that the divisions are neither racial, nor colonial, nor geographical, but rather cultural and, above all, religious, with Islam being linked to greater xenophobia. In the Netherlands, while a slight majority of people of Caribbean origin and a significant proportion of those of Surinamese origin are in relationships with native Dutch people, less than 10% of people of Turkish and

Moroccan origin are in this situation.125 This closed-mindedness is also observed among the majority of descendants of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in Belgium.126 In the United Kingdom, while descendants of European immigrants are 10 times more likely to form an exogamous marriage than an endogamous one, people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin—predominantly Muslim—are 7.9 times more likely to marry within their group than outside of it. Individuals of Indian and Caribbean origin remain predominantly endogamous, but to a lesser extent. They are respectively 1.5 and 1.3 times more likely to marry within their group of origin than outside of it.127 In Denmark, in 2002, 62.7% of unions entered into by Danes of non-Western descent were with partners residing abroad.128 This tendency toward closure is found in all European societies, where "the most significant barriers stand between the majority population and Muslim communities."129 As the philosopher Alain Finkielkraut notes, the frequency of exhortations to live together "reflects the dismay of a society that sees the disappearance of the thing."130 Countries that have welcomed large Muslim populations are therefore not moving toward the creolization and métissage so often celebrated. They are instead confronted with the proliferation of hostile counter-societies, as shown by the levels of residential segregation that particularly affect Islamic minorities. The fundamentalist Youssef al-Qaradawi urged Muslims to create their own ghettos so as not to dissolve into liberal societies.131 In most European cities, Muslims are among the most segregated groups, sometimes even more so than employees and workers.132 In the Netherlands, geographer Sako Musterd has shown that Turks and Moroccans are much more concentrated in certain neighborhoods of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague than people of Surinamese origin.133 In 2021, a veiled woman from the suburbs of Montpellier, in a video that went viral, challenged the President of the Republic about the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in a neighborhood where the name Pierre no longer existed.134 With disarming sincerity, she explained that she had enrolled her daughter in a Catholic school. Cognitive dissonance being what it is, it didn't occur to this well-meaning woman, who, out of

conformity, displayed the symbols of a religion that sows desolation wherever it holds power, that the best way to extricate her children from the environment she decried was to avoid reproducing it. A world adrift. The migrations we are experiencing today are not making our societies more open. The Dutch political scientist Paul Scheffer comments: "The traditional views carried by many migrants suddenly call into question all ideas concerning the place of women, and the right to freely express one's opinion is once again being challenged. Suddenly, we are again talking about blasphemy and the prohibition against leaving one's faith." Even if these are convictions we have known in our own history, having to reiterate the emancipation experienced fifty years ago is certainly not progress.135 The quality of our institutions is weakening as the Muslim population increases and the proportion of non-Muslims declines. The fact that non-Muslim societies offer Muslims more generous living conditions than the Islamic world indicates that this process is in no one's interest. And while we argue about how to characterize the theory of the great replacement coined by the writer Renaud Camus, the enemies of the West are loudly proclaiming their desire to destroy the anthropological foundation that gave birth to the most open civilizations and the modernity from which they too have benefited: "I appeal to my brothers and sisters in Europe. Do not have three, but five children, for you are the future of Europe!" the Turkish president declared to his supporters.136 This declaration of demographic war is far from isolated. “Islam has entered Europe twice, and twice left. Perhaps the next conquest, with the will of Allah, will be through preaching and ideology. Not every land is necessarily conquered by the sword,” declared the Egyptian preacher Qaradawi. “We don’t want to attract attention by saying that we are Islamizing the West, because that doesn’t serve our interests,” Chakib Ben Makhlouf, former head of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, stated in a Saudi media outlet as early as 2011. “If we increase our birth rate, Muslims will represent 10% of the British population and 20% of the French population by 2050, despite any changes in immigration policy. We are not the Zionist lobby; “Our strength lies not in our ability to influence

politicians, but in our numbers," enthuses influencer Mohammed Hijab, who has over a million followers on social media, and whose continued presence in England is somewhat unclear. From 1970 to 2014, the number of mosques in France increased from 100 to 2,300. Outside of colonial empires, the proportion of Muslims in Western European countries at the end of World War II was less than 0.2%. By 2025, it will exceed 5%, with significant variations between countries, reaching up to 10% in France. While seemingly modest, these figures indicate that Islam is the majority religion in an increasing number of neighborhoods. The Seine-Saint-Denis department, the most populous Muslim department in mainland France, has seen its Muslim population rise from 0% to 40% or 50% in less than a century, to the point that conflicts have even arisen within the police force, where some officers are reluctant to work with women.140 Coincidentally, this area has the highest turnover rate in metropolitan France within the civil service, to the point that the government offers exceptional bonuses to encourage its employees to stay.141 These demographic shifts are already giving Islam significant political weight, both locally and nationally, to the point that political science identifies the Muslim vote as a "swing vote," capable of swaying elections.142 "In 2012, François Hollande won against Nicolas Sarkozy by three points […] and he received 90% of the Muslim vote, so we can say that François Hollande was elected by Muslims," states, with a smile, the essayist Hakim El Karoui, speaking to Pascal Boniface, despite having documented the existence of a significant fraction of Muslims who have broken with republican values, is a prime example. This electoral pressure explains why the fight against antisemitism, for secularism, freedom of expression, women's rights, and the rights of other groups persecuted by Islam—foremost among them people of Muslim descent acculturated to the West—is increasingly relegated to the back burner by authorities and political parties. From Mila to Rushdie, via Hirsi Ali, the Jews removed from public schools, not to mention the confinement of the Charlie Hebdo journalists, the fact that fear and the necessity of exile constantly fall upon the victims of fanaticism and not upon the fanatics themselves speaks volumes about the

disastrous path that human rights are taking in Europe. On the international stage, the fact that our leaders use the presence of numerous Algerians on French soil as a pretext to avoid a confrontation with a dictatorship that harasses its opponents abroad, imprisons French writers and journalists, and refuses to take back its most dangerous nationals—when such affronts would once have warranted severe reprisals—is one sign among others of the dissolution of republican institutions and their capacity to protect honest citizens from predators.144 According to projections by the Pew Research Center, the proportion of Muslims in Europe could reach between 7 and 14% continentally by 2050, with significant variations: 13 to 18% in France, 9 to 20% in Germany, 10 to 17% in the United Kingdom, 8 to 14% in Italy, 11 to 18% in Belgium, and as much as 11 to 30% in Sweden.145 The pressure The fact that a small Muslim minority already exerts influence over democratic institutions leaves little doubt about the demise that awaits them if our societies do not thwart these predictions by immediately undertaking their de-Islamization through all lawful means. Divide and rule, unite or perish. "Better the Sultan's turban than the Latin mitre!" a Byzantine aristocrat is said to have proclaimed when the Eastern Roman Empire was threatened with extinction by the Turks. While likely apocryphal, this proclamation nonetheless symbolizes the inability of Europe and Byzantium to unite against the Ottomans, due in particular to their sterile theological disputes. The consequence of these internal quarrels was the eradication of the Greco-Roman East after centuries of gradual erosion by Islam. There is a Byzantine atmosphere in the way our societies squabble over minor issues, allowing the very conditions for their capacity for peaceful debate to die. As the First World War broke out, the European nations set aside their internal quarrels to confront the common enemy with a united front. Catholics, Protestants, Jews, socialists, and traditionalists suddenly dropped their grievances. The knives of hatred, as if by magic, vanished. The countless disputes under the livid sky fell silent. Everyone declared: “I will not, even in secret, stand in the way of anything working for the salvation of the nation.” Without idealizing the time when Europe committed suicide in the name of

the nation, the fact remains that the struggle against its Islamization requires a similar sacred union, as the stakes transcend partisan divisions. The petty squabbles between the right and the left over labor law, the legacy of May '68, gender parity in companies, statues of Saint Michael in public squares, or even the priority given to nuclear energy over wind and solar power are nothing compared to a wave that will sweep everyone away if it is not stopped. As Raymond Aron reminds us: To allow each person a private sphere of decision-making and choice, it is still necessary that all, or most, want to live together and recognize the same system of ideas as true, the same formula of legitimacy as valid. Before society can be free, it must be 147. Thus, what is euphemistically called “Islamist separatism,” but which is in reality only the logical consequence of the Islamization of society, is the primary threat to the nation, as the intelligence services relentlessly emphasize. 148 In other words, political parties that do not place this issue at the top of their priorities deserve to be punished by their voters. Those who believe, in fact, that our societies will still have the luxury of squabbling over the modalities of applying secularism, the fight against racism, or even the retirement age in a country where Islam continues to expand its market share are sorely mistaken. Equally naive are those who place external threats before these internal perils, as if a Europe diluted by Islam would be able to defend its integrity and its allies against foreign predators. Just as Islam ruined the East by triumphing over its ancient civilizations, the way in which progressive movements were decimated in the Muslim world, after having sometimes flirted with the fanatics of Muhammad, leaves little doubt as to what will become of the bohemian bourgeois and their ideals in a Europe undergoing Islamization. It is up to them alone to realize, before it is too late, that the progressive vocabulary used by fundamentalists to seduce them while equating their opponents with the far right is merely a lure designed to trap them and divide our society in order to better rule.149 As time goes on, it will become increasingly difficult and costly to cheat the school zoning system, to retreat into homogeneous neighborhoods, in the center of Versailles or

elsewhere, to escape the customs one pretends to appreciate.150 Naturally, the fight against the Islamization of our societies is also open to Muslims who profess their religion through family conformity—from which one can only hope they will one day detach themselves—but who know, deep down, that their lives and those of their loved ones would be less pleasant if their religion gained influence by supplanting the institutions from which they benefit: “Muslims are the first victims of Islam.” “Emancipating the Muslim from his religion is the best service one can render him,” Ernest Renan rightly asserted. It is surely time to rid ourselves of Stockholm syndrome. From Julian, Count of Ceuta, who facilitated the Muslim conquest of Spain, to Ronald Reagan, who armed Afghan jihadists against the Soviets, by way of Francis I, who forged an alliance with the Ottoman Empire against the Habsburgs, not forgetting the Christian contingents who helped the Turks take Constantinople, the history of the West is teeming with useful idiots of Islam. One is never betrayed except by one's own. Thus, there will never be a shortage of those who, driven by self-hatred or political miscalculation, will welcome the aforementioned transformations. For those who work – consciously or unconsciously – towards their submission to Islam, all changes are equal, on the grounds that our societies have never been static: Invasions, revolutions, the Great Plague, civil wars and world wars, conquest and then loss of the colonial empire, rural exodus, women's suffrage, baby boom, mass schooling, disappearance of a host of professions, collapse of religious practice and vocations, decline of marriage in favor of cohabitation, spread of modern means of contraception, divorce by mutual consent, abolition of military service, increasing access of women to positions of responsibility, construction of Europe, shrinking of territory through the transport revolution, computerization of society, communication by social networks, pandemics, climate disruption […]. The list of ruptures that have constantly shaken our history is long.152 This is what sociologist François Héran argues between lectures at the Collège de France, dismissing the peril posed by the current upheavals with a wave of his hand. It takes a certain audacity to celebrate the increasingly strong presence of ideologies and

individuals more resistant to modern civilization than others by drawing a parallel with a pandemic that decimated half the continent. According to the man who flirted with the idea of reinstating a blasphemy law after the beheading of Samuel Paty,153 Lebanese Christians, who have been marginalized in a nation once called the Switzerland of the East, should put their misfortunes into perspective: didn't their own culture supplant pagan traditions fifteen hundred years earlier? We eagerly await the moment when François Héran will defend the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan or the submersion of the Maldives by rising waters on the grounds that nothing should hinder the march of History and that the climate has always evolved. This verbiage at least has the merit of confirming an observation yesterday proscribed under penalty of social death: Europe is undergoing unprecedented anthropological upheavals since the fall of Rome, sweeping away with them the divisions, conflicts, morals, customs, landscapes, ideas, and institutions that, after so many dramas and sacrifices, ultimately forged the Western genius to which humanity owes a debt.154 The time when the poet Auguste de Châtillon, strolling in the middle of summer on the Île Saint-Denis, sketched in delicate verse "these ladies leaning on the willows, showing their beautiful shoulders" gives way to one in which the neighboring city is marked by new tensions: in the district where the kings of France are buried, female archaeologists in tank tops are harassed by residents who criticize their attire, deemed immodest, and their audacity in practicing a profession they consider reserved for men.155 A few steps from the basilica erected over the tomb of the first Bishop of Paris, shop windows display mannequins of veiled girls, while a bookstore, opposite one of the oldest houses in the city, exhibits texts extolling Saudi ideology written by a preacher who defends slavery. The Parisian neighborhood of La Chapelle is no longer the place immortalized by the writer Albert Simonin, who recounts the story of a modest childhood, where women, in a surge of emancipation, shortened their skirts and mothers breastfed in public with natural freedom. Now, a petition is circulating there to denounce the disappearance of women from the streets, victims of insults uttered “in every language.” Marseille,

where Pagnol recounted his father's anticlerical outbursts that flourished during family disputes, is now led by an elected official who claims to feel at home when he is in the Algerian dictatorship, before going on to praise the tyrant at its head.157 The Phocaean city, which served as the backdrop for the romance of Marius and Fanny, appears, in a fiction of unpleasant realism, as a front in the war against jihad, while organized crime makes this city the laboratory of a narco-state.158 Once admired for its nightlife reminiscent of Paris, its town hall, its imposing spire next to which rises a jumble of bell towers, towers, domes, and sharp roofs in bright colors, Brussels is surrounded by areas where a somber tone reigns. The ladies who wore their bonnets adorned with blue ribbons for Sunday mass, as painted by the writer Camille Lemonnier, have given way to the Saudi fashion which is striking to travelers leaving the station of this city, where there are training centers calling for the murder of homosexuals 159. The rue des Quatre-Vents in Molenbeek, named in homage to a cabaret of the same name, becomes the refuge of fanatics who shed blood at a concert. Once celebrated by travellers as an admirable municipality where the working classes are driven by faith in science and progress, Birmingham is converting its neo-Gothic libraries into mosques inside which bearded men explain how to properly stone women, without being bothered by the authorities, while schools there forbid music, but organize trips to Saudi Arabia 160. Cradle of parliamentarism, the Palace of Westminster loses a member of parliament following death threats made because of his opposition to Hamas, but gains bigots who demand the establishment of a blasphemy law 161. In this country where a teacher's mere use of caricatures of Muhammad in class is enough to force them into hiding, the national health agency emphasizes the economic benefits of consanguineous marriages and urges against stigmatizing this tradition before backing down in the face of the ensuing outcry.162 Even movie theaters yield to pressure from fanatics, canceling screenings of films that nonetheless glorify the daughter of their self-proclaimed prophet.163 In 2010, the Dutch liberal politician Frits Bolkestein caused a scandal by advising Jews to flee the homeland of Spinoza.164 Fifteen years

later, a pre-planned hunt for Jews took place in the heart of Amsterdam, forcing Israeli authorities to carry out an emergency evacuation of their citizens.165 In Germany, the city of Hamburg, birthplace of Brahms, Fanny, and Felix Mendelssohn, is the scene of schoolchildren's protests. who boycott music classes they deem immoral. 166. At the same time, a Berlin professor complains of his superiors' passivity in the face of the onslaught of homophobic insults he endures from his students. 167. Through naivety, cowardice, ignorance, and in the name of a false conception of tolerance, Europe has destroyed in a few decades a social fabric it took centuries to build. "Our horizon is not the great replacement but the great renewal," François Héran exclaims in a burst of enthusiasm as terrifying as it is totalitarian. From there to thinking that this "great renewal" will give birth to the best of all possible worlds, there is only one step, a step that only madmen would take.

Epilogue: Leaving Islam.

We civilizations now know that we are mortal. Paul Valéry, For a Radical Republicanism. In his work Democracy in America, Tocqueville writes: “Muhammad sent down from heaven, and placed in the Quran, not only religious doctrines, but also political maxims, civil and criminal laws, and scientific theories. The Gospel, on the contrary, speaks only of the general relationships of humankind with God and with one another. Beyond this, it teaches nothing and compels belief in nothing. This alone, among a thousand other reasons, suffices to show that the first of these two religions could not long dominate in times of enlightenment and democracy, while the second is destined to reign in these centuries as in all others.” This optimistic prophecy foretold the inexorable decline of the most despotic beliefs and the triumph of the gentlest customs. At the time the French aristocrat wrote these lines, Islam represented only about one-tenth of humanity; today it accounts for a quarter. And the pressure that Islamic superstition exerts on Western societies poses an unprecedented risk: that of helplessly witnessing the death of their own principles. Let's face the facts: "There is no proof that cultures beneficial to humankind must inexorably succeed and spread, while less beneficial cultures disappear," as the historian Yuval Noah Harari points out. Faith in the inevitability of progress is just another illusion that must be

ruthlessly dispelled. The Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto saw history as a graveyard of aristocracies; it is also the mausoleum of superior civilizations, swept away by less refined cultures. Where would Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and the entire Maghreb be if Islam had not dethroned the indigenous civilizations that preceded Quranic idolatry? Darkness triumphs all the more easily when civilized nations renounce defending and transmitting the enlightenment that made them great, abandoning the field to the most obscurantist traditions. "Is it not shameful that fanatics have zeal and the wise do not?" Voltaire indignantly asked. It is time to put an end to this indignity. The myth of reform or the dangerous illusion of liberal Islam: Our societies, supposedly placing reason above all else, are lying to themselves. They invent an Islamic golden age that profanes the cultures destroyed by Muslims, cultures that would undoubtedly have made far richer contributions to humanity. Haunted by their colonial past, at the risk of forgetting the imperial and slave-trading history of non-Western worlds, they persuade themselves that Islam has nothing to do with the crimes committed in its name. They hunt for hatred in every fold of their history, but refuse to denounce it where it is openly displayed. To reassure themselves as much as to infantilize Muslims, they invent a distinction between Islam and Islamism, when this recently created, Western construct has little resonance in the Muslim world, to the point that the notion of "fighting Islamism" poses translation problems there. The most audacious proposal put forward today to pacify Muslims, their relations with their neighbors, and their host societies consists of shaping a "liberal Islam": inviting or forcing believers to strip their religion of its legal and political dimensions—which amounts to recognizing its incompatibility with modern civilization. This chimera is a recurring theme as old as the confrontation between Islam and the contemporary world. As early as the 19th century, the Saint-Simonian Ismaÿl Urbain, an inspiration for Napoleon III's Algerian policy, wrote: "As long as the Indigenous people have not effected a radical separation between the spiritual and the temporal, as long as their worship and religious dogmas contradict our Codes, they cannot be granted the title of French citizens. The Koran must

become for them a purely religious book, without influence on civil legislation. This progress is not impossible. Other peoples have emerged from theocratic systems and submitted to secular government without renouncing their beliefs. The colonizer failed." The reformers who attempted this met even more tragic fates: ostracism for the Egyptian Ali Abderraziq, who challenged the political dimension of his religion, and hanging in 1985 for the Sudanese Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, who campaigned against Sharia law in his native country. “In the Muslim world, you don’t have critical historians. Because they risk getting their skin shot,” summarizes Jacqueline Chabbi. To claim that any religion will eventually accommodate modern freedoms simply because Christianity has done so is dangerously naive. Every religion is born in a unique anthropological context. Just as Jainism cannot be placed on the same level as pre-Columbian religions, Christianity—which is essentially Hellenized Judaism—cannot be confused with a religion that, in addition to its Judeo-Christian roots, also incorporates Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and Bedouin influences. Such diverse mixtures do not have the same effects on the health of the societies that absorb them. “The well-being of the people, in particular, has always been the alibi of tyrants,” said Albert Camus. Any doctrine, religious or secular, even the most seemingly charitable, can inspire wrongdoing. Many crimes have been committed in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity without anyone considering using these misfortunes as a pretext to discredit these noble values. For while some crimes betray the very ideals they claim to uphold, others apply them rigorously. Unlike the Ku Klux Klan, which largely disregards the Sermon on the Mount, members of ISIS apply Islamic texts to perfection. According to Islamic scholar Anne-Marie Delcambre: "At the risk of causing offense, we must have the courage to say that fundamentalism is not a disease of Islam. It is the entirety of Islam. It is the literal, comprehensive, and total interpretation of its foundational texts. The Islam of fundamentalists, of Islamists, is simply legalistic Islam that adheres to the norm. Thus, 'the most open-minded, the most modern Muslim, the one most eager to see Islam evolve, inevitably clashes with the Quran.' While there are

respectable Muslims, their civility owes nothing to the religion they profess. People do not always live in complete accordance with the values they profess." Like other cultures, Muslim societies have experienced periods of weakening their values, particularly since their encounter with modern Europe: “The Orient will soon be nothing but the sun. In Constantinople, most men are dressed in European style; opera is performed there; there are reading rooms, milliners, etc. In a hundred years, the harem, gradually invaded by the presence of Frankish ladies, will collapse on its own, under the weight of serialized novels and vaudeville,” worried Flaubert, fearing he would no longer be able to satisfy his thirst for the exotic due to the disappearance of the old Orient.9 The writer can rest easy: two centuries later, Muslim women remain subjugated, minorities persecuted, and exoticism has survived. Even when Islamic law becomes more flexible, the refusal to repudiate Mahometan superstition and our societies' obstinacy in granting it legitimacy condemn these liberal experiments to remain precarious and superficial, trapping those involved in an insoluble cognitive dissonance. When Turkey cautiously opened itself to Western influences in the 19th century, an Ottoman administrator expressed his dismay in the following way: “What am I to do? I govern a province, and the Grand Vizier sends me an order that conforms to the new ideas we profess. The şeyhülislam complains about me because I am not acting in accordance with the old laws, which for him are still sacred. I say that the two are incompatible, and I am told that I must follow our customs, but that I must dress them in new clothes. I don't know which way to turn.” This episode illustrates the tensions that affect Muslims to varying degrees. Between Olympe de Gouges and Muhammad, between the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Quran, between Tocqueville and Allah, there can only be an eternal war—sometimes declared, sometimes latent—until one capitulates. While no society is free from contradictions, some are less tolerable than others. Even the most favorable arguments for the Muslim religion, which disregard its falsity, gloss over its totalitarian aspects, and maintain that it “abounds in seemingly contradictory statements” that allow for widely varying interpretations, neglect

the fact that these supposed qualities are not those of a philosophy and a legal system worthy of the name, especially when they claim a divine origin. No healthy and lasting society can be built on such unstable and corrupted ground, which breeds too many fanatics capable of claiming to be the most faithful to Islamic traditions. This breeding ground condemns our societies to eternal and unbearable tensions, tensions that could be avoided by wielding the weapon of truth. The chimera of a liberal Islam has served only to stir up, in vain, the ink of newspapers and the air of television studios, fostering theological quibbles that border on the absurd and transform our societies into open-air asylums. One theologian will argue that the Quran is "uncreated," so that it would be permissible to pick and choose between the commandments of a god who forbids pork while simultaneously authorizing sexual slavery and domestic violence, and not the other way around. Another author will isolate two or three verses that vaguely exhort Muslims to reflection in order to convince themselves that the Quranic prose is capable of inspiring the Marie Curies and Martin Luther Kings of tomorrow. With all due respect to these reformers, some of whom take genuine risks, these contortions are about as convincing as taking a Mao Zedong quote out of context to portray him as a defender of bourgeois capitalism. A flat-earther who resorted to such flimsy arguments to refuse to abandon their beliefs in favor of more just doctrines would make a fool of themselves. For reasons that elude us, only religions have the right to cloak any esoteric speculation in a veneer of respectability, while decent people "laugh at theological disputes as if they were Italian farce." Given the content of Islamic texts and the status they claim, the desire to civilize Islam from within, using Muslim sources, requires efforts comparable to those of the alchemists who sought to transform lead into gold. The reformist illusion—which fundamentalists themselves have sometimes cultivated to lull us to sleep—has only delayed the only effective treatment: a scientific, relentless, and aggressive discourse on the Muslim religion and, more broadly, on religion itself. This inaction has allowed the superstition surrounding Muhammad to expand its market share, swell the ranks of fanatics, and bring our societies

dangerously close to the point of no return. “Admit that a tree that has always borne poison must be cut down by the roots.” Voltaire, again and again. A plea for mass apostasy. On August 12, 2022, in the heart of a cultural center in upstate New York, Salman Rushdie was brutally stabbed by a Shiite Muslim, a fervent admirer of Ayatollah Khomeini—the man who, more than thirty years earlier, had pronounced a death sentence against the writer. Rushdie’s crime? Having dared to publish a book deemed blasphemous. For the fanatics of Muhammad, the fact that the author comes from a Muslim background aggravates the offense. A network of Iranian-affiliated media outlets rejoices at this attack against the "apostate" Rushdie, whom Islamic law condemns to death. "Whoever changes his religion, kill him," utters a saying attributed to Muhammad, who, according to Muslim tradition, did not hesitate to order the assassination of satirists who mocked him. For the fundamentalist Qaradawi, the execution of apostates is a political necessity: without it, "Islam would never have existed; it would have died out with the death of the Prophet." This is a striking admission of the repulsive nature of a religion that must eliminate its dissidents to survive: this is the definition of a sect. Yet Qaradawi is right on one point: the apostate defies Islam at its core. By abandoning Islamic superstition, he demonstrates that it is not an irresistible dogma. His very existence cracks certainties, opening horizons that fanatics relentlessly try to block. Freedom is contagious. This is why the figure of the apostate deserves to be celebrated and supported, so that it may inspire as many people as possible. The paths to apostasy will be many: some will succumb to the allure of non-Muslim societies and their achievements; others will be repulsed by the dysfunctions of the Islamic world; still others will be persuaded by those ex-Muslims who dissect the contradictions of their former beliefs to liberate their peers; finally, some may embrace another faith. In any case, this movement, still diffuse and undefined, must organize itself. All institutions—public or private, religious or secular—have a duty to contribute to swelling its ranks. A far-fetched scenario? Some Muslim countries are nevertheless showing encouraging signs. In July 2025, Fondapol published a study conducted by two

academics of Iranian origin living in the Netherlands, which measures the extent of secularization in Iran. “After weighting and constructing a representative sample of the literate adult population (88% of the total population), we found that 32% identified as Shiite Muslims, 22% as ‘unaffiliated,’ 9% as atheists, 7% as spiritualists, and 6% as agnostics, alongside smaller groups,” the authors state.16 In a theocracy where religious propaganda permeates every corner of daily life and where skeptics risk death at any moment, such levels of disaffiliation are astonishing. All the more so, the spaces of freedom that Western societies still preserve—provided they are utilized—allow us to hope for much more. We have no excuse. A Judeo-Christian revival? For a long time, Europe was synonymous with Christendom. For better or for worse, Christianity has shaped Europeans' relationship to time, space, the body, law, politics, architecture, literature, music, and so many other dimensions of existence. Stating this is not tantamount to making a value judgment. The French revolutionaries, who in their fervor banned processions and even temporarily abolished the Gregorian calendar, were among the first to recognize the influence of this religion on customs—if only to combat it. Two centuries later, no one disputes the success of their endeavor. Priestly vocations have plummeted, baptisms have declined, and churches have emptied. Without a doubt, the dechristianization of France, and with it that of the Old Continent, stands out as one of the defining phenomena of our time.17 From there to blaming it for most of the ills of our era is but a short step, one that some readily take. “Drive out Christianity, and you will have Islam,” proclaims a maxim attributed to Chateaubriand, which circulates in conservative circles. Although apocryphal, this saying disseminates a simple idea: the dechristianization of Europe paved the way for its Islamization. “The dechristianization of France is a fundamental movement that has been ongoing since the 18th century. For a century, the Republic waged its battle against Christianity. The unexpected result today is Islamization in France,” argues the essayist Éric Zemmour. True to this credo, the man who helped propel the Muslim question to the forefront of the media agenda

accuses the Enlightenment and the republican project of having let the wolf into the sheepfold, by eradicating the antibodies capable of repelling the Islamization of the continent.18 Ironically, one of the most obvious symptoms of dechristianization lies precisely in the way Christianity is now defended. For Zemmour and so many others, the cause is no longer argued on the grounds of revealed truth. The era when Christian theologians denounced Muslims as disciples of the Antichrist and expended colossal energy to establish the validity of the Trinity is over. Zemmour does not urge the French to "re-Christianize" themselves by invoking the resurrection of Christ. He hardly believes in it. Otherwise, he would be baptized. One cannot help but detect a form of condescension in preaching, to others, an ideology one knows to be false. As if Christianity were suitable for the fragile creatures that make up the masses, while its most zealous adherents, clear-sighted enough to do without it, can appreciate its political virtues without subscribing to these unverifiable fables. Such is the paradox of calls for re-Christianization: unable to demonstrate the veracity of the Christian religion, they take refuge in utilitarian arguments that leave the soul thirsting for truth unsatisfied. Therefore, let us consider the consequences, since that is where we are invited to debate. Is Christianity the strongest—or even the only—bulwark that Europe can oppose to its Islamization? Let us acknowledge this: all things considered, a society with a Christian culture is better than an Islamized country. “If I had to choose between Christianity and Islam, I would choose Christianity every time,” declares the British biologist and atheist activist Richard Dawkins, whose honesty leads him to reject the pseudo-secular stance that equates all religions.19 It is to be feared that false equivalences have contributed to downplaying the most serious threats. Someone who consults their horoscope or attends Mass, while legitimately arousing the skeptical gaze of the freethinker, does not raise the same political issues as the mosque worshipper. Just as the liberal does not need to revere social democracy to judge it less dangerous than communism, the atheist who refuses to give any credence to the Gospels can recognize that these fables have historically proven more vulnerable to challenge than Quranic lies:

“Western theology has been no less persecutory than that of Islam.” “However, it did not succeed, it did not crush the modern spirit,” Renan judged, emphasizing that Christianity, no more enlightened than Islam in his eyes, proved less capable than Muslims of stifling science and philosophy.20 However, the commonplace notion of Christianity as the supreme bulwark against Islamization clashes with fourteen centuries of history in which Christendom, with rare exceptions, has constantly retreated in the face of the spread of Islam. The Maghreb, the Mashriq, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Anatolia, Sudan, and even Arabia were once major Christian centers. Apart from a few endangered minorities, all of this has vanished to such an extent that the Muslim populations of these regions cultivate, with little justification, ignorance of their pre-Islamic past. “We know that Muslims converted, willingly or by force, several million Christians; “But neither seduction nor threats have snatched a soul from the faith of Muhammad,” we read in the writings of Edmond About.21 Contrary to the reproaches of the conservative camp, the only moment when the foundations of Islamic civilization truly wavered coincided with the spread of secular ideas in the Arab-Muslim world. As Bernard Lewis notes: “The French Revolution was the first great movement of ideas that crossed the barrier separating the house of war from the house of Islam, finding a favorable reception among Muslim leaders and thinkers and affecting, to a greater or lesser degree, all strata of Islamic society.”22 It was not in the name of the Gospels, but of progress, that the Tunisian Bourguiba modernized the status of women; that the King of Afghanistan Amanullah Khan aspired to unveil the women of his country; that Persia attempted its first constitutional revolution at the beginning of the 20th century; Turkey, after adopting a civil code inspired by the Swiss model (itself derived from the German model, which in turn drew upon the French model), undertook one of the most extensive social engineering projects in modern history by replacing the Arabic alphabet with Latin characters. Atatürk thus advocated for his people to free themselves from these incomprehensible symbols that had held our minds in an iron grip for centuries. You will need to learn the new Turkish alphabet

quickly. […] Our nation will show, through its writing and its intelligence, that it has its place in the civilized world. 23. If the Enlightenment has not yet triumphed over Muslim superstition—due to the resistance of the devout as well as the pusillanimity of the progressive camp and its reluctance to use all the weapons at its disposal—two centuries of modernization under the banner of progress have shaken the mentalities and institutions of Muslim societies more than a thousand years of confrontation with Christendom, its armies, and its apologetic literature. As Renan also affirms: If religions divide men, reason brings them together […]. The unity of the human spirit is the great and comforting result that emerges from the peaceful clash of ideas, when one sets aside the opposing claims of so-called supernatural revelations. The league of good minds throughout the world against fanaticism and superstition is, on the surface, the work of an imperceptible minority; Ultimately, it is the only lasting league, because it rests on truth, and it will eventually prevail, after the rival fables have exhausted themselves in centuries of impotent convulsions.24 The tragedy is that the civilization that carried the torch of progress to the ends of the earth has ended up doubting its own light. “Islam may be experiencing quantifiable backwardness, but it is lagging behind in a time when progress has a bad reputation,” observes the American journalist Christopher Caldwell.25 This observation is corroborated by the existence, within the major religions, of currents tempted to spare each other in order to direct their attacks against the real or perceived imperfections of modern societies. It is distressing to observe that the Catholic hierarchy shows more eagerness to attack contemporary individualism than the religion that is in the process of eradicating Christianity in the lands that were its cradle. This lack of courage is undoubtedly attributable to the fact that hedonists, unlike the Muslims, do not slaughter anyone, whereas Benedict XVI's mere mention of critical remarks about Islam made five hundred years ago is enough to trigger deadly riots in the Muslim world.26 We recall the famous remark by Patrick Buisson, former advisor to President Sarkozy: "I have more respect for a Muslim who prays five times a day than for a bourgeois environmentalist on a scooter." This devout Catholic,

with his bookish culture, neglected, however, to mention that the life expectancy of someone who campaigns for the celebration of Mass in Latin and protests against the legacy of May '68 is higher in the 11th arrondissement of Paris than in the heart of Kabul. Islamic studies is a contact sport. On August 30, 2009, Ayatollah Khamenei addressed administrators and teachers in the academic world, warning them that the humanities fostered “skepticism and doubt regarding religious principles and beliefs.” The following year, the regime restricted student access to these fields.27 It is because the humanities allow us to take a step back from our societies and their workings that they are a prime weapon in the fight against superstition. In the study of religion and Islam, Europe has many advantages by virtue of a long and prestigious Orientalist tradition.28 Since the time when Peter the Venerable had the Quran first translated into Latin, the progress that Islamic studies has made is such that it has the power to destroy obscurantism. We know that the Quran was not formed in accordance with the narrative of Muslim tradition; that this text, despite its claims, contains no coherence; that the early centuries of Islam were fertile ground for numerous accusations that certain groups of Muslims had tampered with the Quranic text to the detriment of other factions; that verses were moved; that the "official" version of the Quran was not established before the 10th century; that the supposed word of God contains major historical errors concerning the peoples and cults of Arabia; that the authors of the Quran plundered Jewish and Christian literature; that the five daily prayers are the result of plagiarism from the Zoroastrian religion; that no one can construct a reliable biography of Muhammad, as the reliability of Muslim sources approaches absolute zero, among other elements that would be impossible to list in their entirety. Our societies would benefit from their educational and media systems disseminating the findings of the historical-critical method more widely. Let them finally be taught like we learn the Earth's roundness or the evolution of species: calmly, extensively, without fear of offending beliefs. Islamic studies must free itself from the grotesque accusations leveled against it. The fact that unjust treatment inflicted on indigenous

peoples may have been based on the denigration of Islamic traditions does not invalidate the need to criticize questionable customs so that they may be amended or disappear. It is not true that historians must respect beliefs. People have rights. Not the ideas they profess. No longer tolerate the intolerable. In his work entitled *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, the philosopher Karl Popper sets forth the paradox of tolerance as follows: Unlimited tolerance can only lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we grant unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them [...]. We should affirm that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law, and consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal, in the same way that we would consider incitement to murder, kidnapping, or the revival of the slave trade as criminal.29 Another paradox is that the eldest daughter of the Church was once far more uncompromising toward her historical religion than she is today in the face of a much more dangerous imported superstition. Without even mentioning the Revolution, the determination with which the Third Republic—credited with establishing major civil liberties—fought the Church's influence on society makes even the most anticlerical among us seem like gentle lambs. "My goal," proclaimed Jules Ferry, "is to organize humanity without God or kings." The father of secular education believed that "the Republic is doomed if the State does not free itself from the Church, if it does not dispel the darkness of dogma." Throughout the second half of the 19th century, until the separation of Church and State in 1905, a series of energetic measures were taken to free French society from the grip of Catholicism: exclusion of the clergy from the Council of Public Instruction and academic councils; closure of hundreds of convents; expulsion of ecclesiastical personnel from public primary schools and then from teaching; registration of soldiers attending mass; dismissal of hundreds of magistrates hindering the application of anti-clerical decrees; not forgetting the mass expulsions of congregations in 1880, then from 1902 onwards, which led to the exile of tens of thousands of monks and nuns.

Prime Minister Émile Combes asserted: “It is not an attack on liberty to prevent the formation, within society, of institutions dedicated to its destruction, founded on the abolition of individual liberty and designed to undermine the political and social system they claim to uphold in order to work tirelessly toward its ruin.”30 The fight against Islamization must rediscover the vigor of the republicanism of yesteryear. “Democracy tends to ignore, or even deny, the threats against it, so reluctant is it to take the necessary measures to respond to them,” lamented Jean-François Revel.31 Our societies must rediscover a skill they have lost: distinguishing the opponent from the enemy, that is, the one who disagrees on the means of perfecting our civilization from the one who knowingly wishes to destroy its most honorable aspects. To this end, we must stop importing ever more populations bearing values hostile to our civilization and systematically expel those who do not adhere to it. Race and ethnicity are irrelevant. A Lebanese, a West Indian, or an Asian of Christian, secular, Buddhist, or Confucian culture will more easily adopt European values than a white-skinned, fundamentalist Chechen. The Muslim Brotherhood and all fundamentalist organizations that work, openly or covertly, to Islamize our societies, breaking with Western democratic tradition, must be classified as terrorist organizations. Activists associated with these organizations must be stripped of their citizenship, expelled, and have their property confiscated so that setting foot on European soil gives them the feeling of being in the hell they fear in their sacred texts. Similar measures must be taken against consular organizations and other institutions linked to the countries of origin that use religion and their diasporas for destabilizing purposes. They will recognize themselves. Those who teach the literal perfection of the Quran and the absolute exemplarity of Muhammad are, by that very act, condoning crimes that the law punishes without hesitation. Their place is not among us. There are more than fifty Muslim countries to which these militants, in accordance with the laws of their superstition, can migrate. At the Crossroads, discussing the Islamic surge, André Malraux continued as follows: The Western world seems hardly prepared to confront the problem of Islam. In theory, the solution also appears

extremely difficult [...]. Perhaps partial solutions would have sufficed to stem the tide of Islam, if they had been implemented in time. Currently, it is too late! […] all we can do is recognize the gravity of the phenomenon and try to slow its progression. 32 If, contrary to this pessimistic assessment, the battle is far from over, the fact remains that time is not on the West's side. Like the delay our societies are experiencing in the fight against climate change, every passing second shrinks the window of opportunity to protect the finest achievements of our civilization. The Islamization of our societies is the greatest challenge they face, as this process entails damage that is difficult to reverse. On a smaller scale, we have seen nations rise from the ashes after military defeats, bank failures, fascist and communist dictatorships, ecological catastrophes, and even after suffering two atomic bombs. We have seen nations return from death camps and, having survived genocidal atrocities, build, in a few decades, a society that would make their neighbors envious. While it would be unfair to compare the brutality of these murderous episodes with the Islamization of a society, the fact remains that the number of countries that freed themselves from the superstition surrounding Muhammad once his influence was firmly established can be counted on one hand. In this sense, the East holds up, once again, the mirror of a tragic history as a warning. Traveling through the Levant, Lamartine gazed nostalgically at the ruins of Baalbek and its Greco-Roman architecture, fallen under the Ottoman yoke. He admired those gigantic walls, those dazzling columns, those statues lying face down in a chaotic scene, where the finest works of art flowed from every direction, "like the lava of a volcano spewing forth the debris of a great empire." He marveled at this “hill of architecture,” these temples raised like statues on their pedestals to the glory of Bacchus, Jupiter, and Venus, and at the magnificent spectacle of the marble gleams on the Acropolis, chased away by the shadows of the porticoes, pillars, colonnades, and altars. And the poet let himself be lulled by the song intoned by an Arab cleric within the crumbling walls of an old church, a sanctuary for those Eastern Christians “drowned in the Islam that surrounds them,” seeing in the West their future liberator. It was indeed the marvel of the

desert, the fabulous Baalbek, “emerging resplendent from its unknown sepulcher, to tell us of ages whose memory history has lost.” It is now up to Europeans to define how travelers will depict their monuments in the future, from the Louvre Museum to Edinburgh Castle, by way of Cologne Cathedral, the Grand-Place in Brussels, the canals of Amsterdam, and so many other landscapes they have shaped: as the jewels of a radiant culture or the vestiges of a bygone era.

Notes

Introduction

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